COMIC SCENE

# HISTORY OF COMICS

## 1977

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# THE HISTORY OF COMICS

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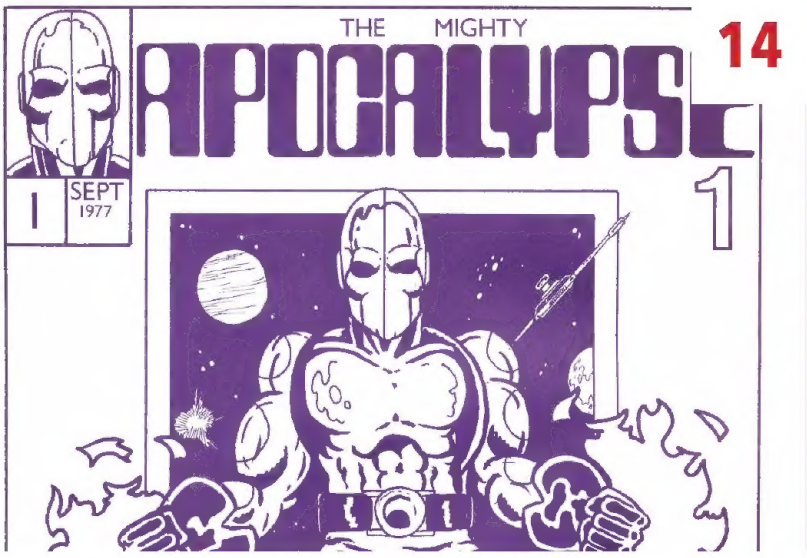


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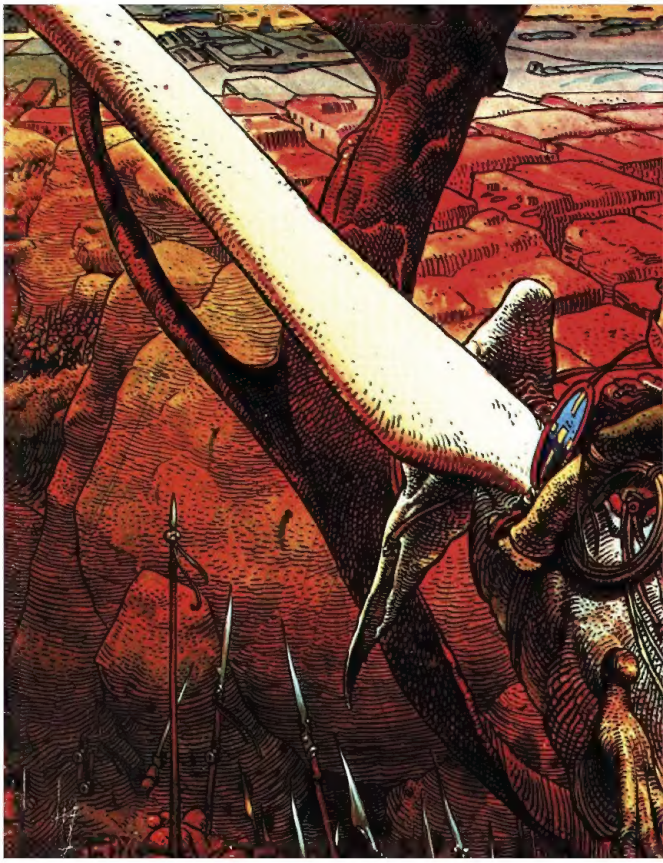

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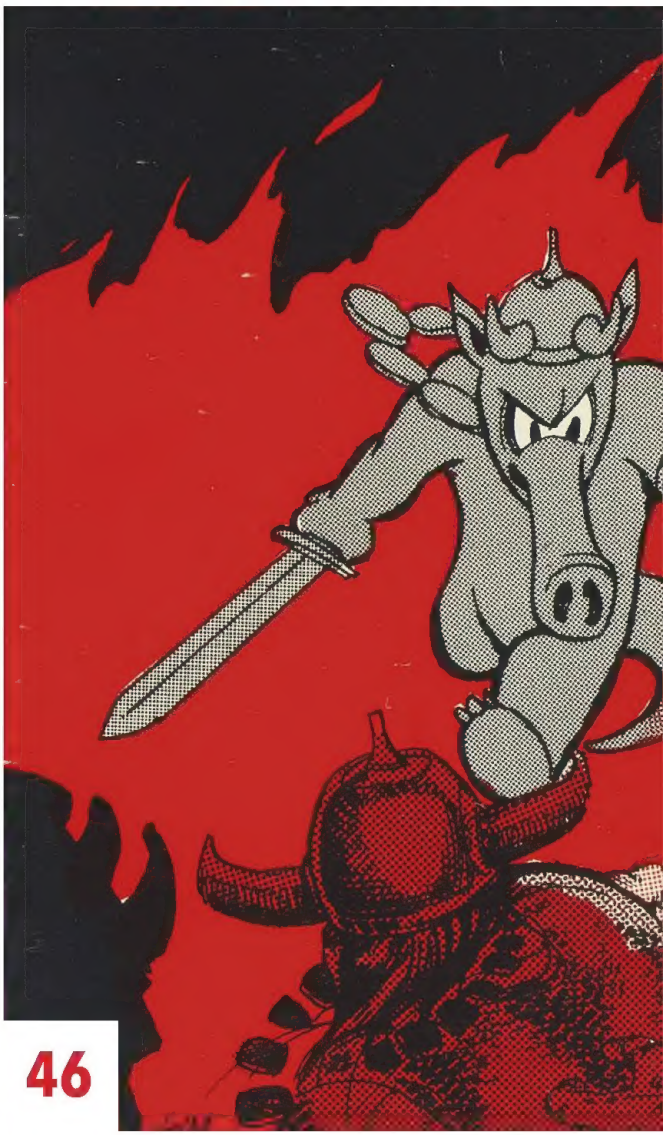

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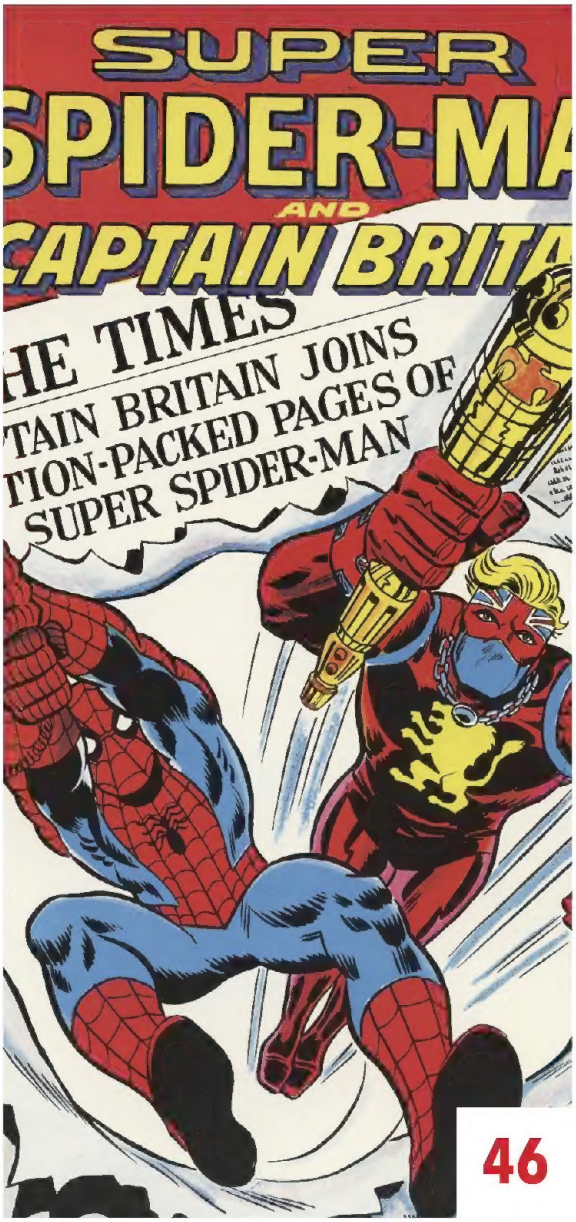


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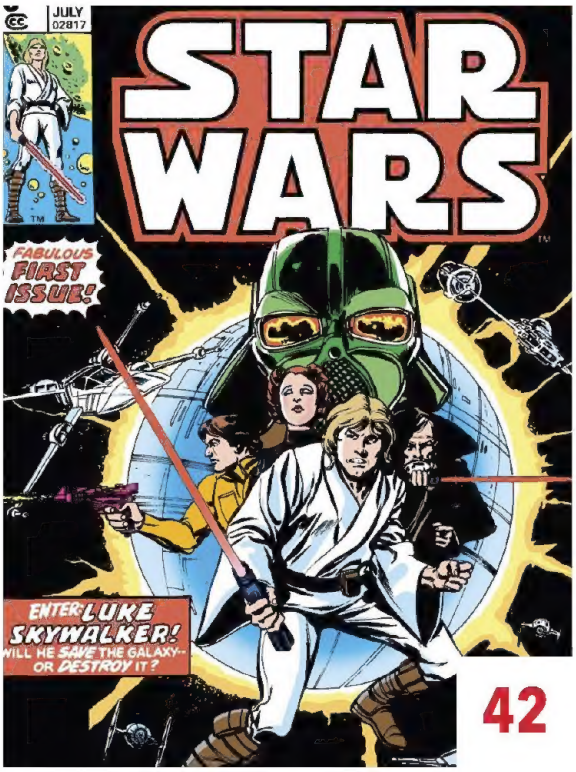


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YANCY STREET
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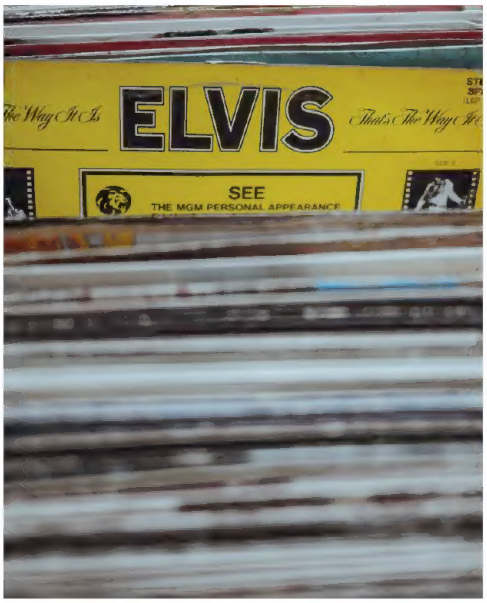

ELVIS
SEE
THE MGM PERSONAL APPEARANCE

IT! YOUR VERY OWN ROBOT-DOG
SEE CONTEST INSIDE!
DC
ISSUE 11
INDIA
RS. 15
GOTHAM

# 1977
# CULTURE & COMICS

## "Damnant quod non intelligent [sic]"

Stan Lee (aka Anon)

1977, Elvis Presley left the building for the very last time. His untimely death at only 42 saved some record pressing plants as people rushed to put him into the charts again.

However, by then there were other music styles which people were responding to, the most important being Punk. From New York City came two quite different styles of this revolutionary music. The Ramones dressed in black and were VERY loud ("I've got all their records and I don't know what they're singing."). Talking Heads were the Art House equivalent with brilliant and sometimes philosophical lyrics.

Meanwhile in the UK, Malcolm McLaren and his designer girlfriend Vivienne Westwood created the very stylish Sex Pistols, that is if you like safety pins. They recorded a very moving lyric to celebrate the monarch's jubilee: "God save the Queen/And her fascist regime". Elvis they weren't.

Fleetwood Mac released Rumours, but one of the most popular recording artists was actually Olivia Newton John. She features a few times in this brief run through this most interesting year.

On TV the one-off play Scum was pulled from the schedules by the BBC who, after commissioning it, did not like its violent portrayal of boys in a borstal (a youth detention centre). It was finally shown by the more open-minded Channel 4 in 1991, but by then its originality which had captured the zeitgeist had worn off quite a bit.

We shall eventually get to the most important film of 1977, but there was quite a variety on our screens from Sci-Fi (Close Encounters) to Art House (Eraserhead) to horror (The Hills have Eyes) to animation (Wizards by Ralph Bakshi – designs by Werewolf by Night's Mike Ploog).

There was quite a variety available in our bookshops as well. Philip K Dick's A Scanner Darkly sat beside JRR Tolkien's long awaited Silmarilion and, for Horror fans, this was the year of The Shining. There were even graphic novels. A collection of the famous London Evening News comic strip, the Moomins, was available for the first time. This wonderful strip by Finland's Tove Jansson enchanted adults as well as children and has rarely been out of print. And Osamu Tezuka's Black Jack was available in English the same year that it won the 1st Kodansha Manga Award. This much adapted story is about a strange looking character who is an unlicensed surgeon who goes around doing good deeds. Well worth checking out still.

Back in the USA, DC Comics was not having the best of times.

In January 1976, Carmine Infantino had been replaced as Publisher of National Periodical Publications by Jenette Kahn, previously from the world of children's magazines rather than from comics. She had quickly changed the official name of the company to DC and in 1977 introduced a new logo designed by Milton Glaser. But a snazzy logo doth not a company make.

Dollar Comics was an attempt to bring Hardback/Paperback thinking into the comics business. The regular comics had only 17 pages of story with adverts and sold for 35c, but the $1 variety had no ads and more story. It failed to catch on.

New titles were added to the line. Shade the Changing Man by Michael Fleisher and Steve Ditko was weird, but in an intriguing way. Many other titles failed attract attention.

Star Spangled War Stories came to an end after an impressive 204 issues and a new war comic called Men of War appeared. It meant well, but the stories were lackluster.

Jonah Hex got his own title and was replaced in Weird Western Tales by Scalphunter. It was very dull.

Black Lightning was DC's first African-American superhero – years after Marvel's Hero for Hire (1972) and

Lee/Kirby's Black Panther (1966). DC's attempt to keep up was both too late and second rate.

The numerous full page adverts for Superman vs Muhammad Ali promised this 72 page tabloid as "Coming this Winter". By the time it did eventually appear Ali had temporarily lost his title. It was actually worth the wait, but not for anyone's Xmas present in 1977.

However, DC did have one great and oft reprinted success: Detective Comics.

After an impressive run at Marvel, Steve Englehart was going to leave comics, move to Europe, and write novels. But Jenette Kahn persuaded him to write both the JLA and Batman in Detective Comics. He refused to consider any more than that. However, his work on Batman with Walt Simonson and later Marshall Rogers changed Englehart's commitment to the medium.

Batman was once again a great series. With Walt Simonson, Englehart introduced Silver St Cloud as a credible love interest. This storyline has obvious influence on the 1989 Batman film. Then, when Englehart saw the artwork of Rogers, he was blown away. This team has been described as "one of the greatest" to work on the Kane/Finger/Robinson characters.

To take Detective #475 as merely one example: The lettering style of the captions harks back to the 1940s style. The Joker becomes genuinely funny and quite quite mad; on page 11, for no apparent reason, he throws one of his henchmen into the road where he is killed by a passing truck. The interweaving plots owe a lot to the Marvel soap opera style where you cannot resist coming back for more. And Englehart has picked up another stylistic device from Stan Lee: "...but don't despair, action-lovers! Your day is dawning soon!" says one caption.

And speaking of Stan Lee...

Jim Galton was now president of Magazine Management who owned Marvel. Comic sales were declining and he persuaded Lee to concentrate on Hollywood and licensing. As if Stan needed any persuasion to go to Hollywood. Archie Goodwin was now editor-in-chief of Marvel which freed Stan up to be out of the office.

Stan had been publishing in all the books the almost monthly Stan's Soapbox since 1967. Early subjects Stan covered ranged from bigotry and racism, The Attica Prison Riots, who worked in the mythical Bullpen, and how comics were created. But to read the ones from 1977, you would think Stan was constantly on tour, and the Soapbox was just there to plug projects. But there were a lot of projects to plug.

Stan was determined to address an older and more cultured audience – just as EC had done in the 1950s. He often dropped in Latin words like "pabulum" to prove that he would not talk down to his readers. Unfortunately, his Latin spelling is not always up to his own high standards – the last word of the opening quote to this essay should be "intelligunt" – but the message is "They condemn what they do not understand" and is addressed to those in society who do not take comics seriously or, like Wertham in the 1950s, actively seek to attack them.

He would write about all the places he was visiting. In Glasgow I gave him the Gaelic phrase which he used twice in the Soapbox: "Ceud Mile Failte", a hundred thousand welcomes. I made sure he got the spelling correct.

> "Carmine Infantino had worked with Goodman's company back in 1942 on the Human Torch and **Angel and Stan had wanted him at Marvel** in 1967, but Infantino had opted to go to DC.

Stan had books coming out from Simon and Schuster, the latest being BRING ON THE BAD GUYS – always in caps. He had his own two newspaper strips, SAY WHO and THE VIRTUE OF VERA VALIANT. Later on he teamed up with John Buscema, who had a comics art class which was often plugged in the Soapbox, to produce HOW TO DRAW COMICS THE MARVEL WAY, still a major textbook in classes throughout the world.

Then there were the magazines. With Martin Goodman (not, as you may have been told, an uncle) out of the way, Stan

could also publish magazines. There was PIZZAZZ, and CELEBRITY, and KISS (which sold more than half a million at $1.50, several times the sales and the price of a regular comic). Oh, almost forgot, there were comics. Carmine Infantino had worked with Goodman's company back in 1942 on the Human Torch and Angel and Stan had wanted him at Marvel in 1967, but Infantino had opted to go to DC. Now that he was no longer required at DC, Stan had no problem getting his old friend involved with Marvel. Even on one of the biggest comics events of the '70s...

Stan had turned down a proposal in 1975 from some guy called George Lucas to release a comic based on Star Wars before the movie's release. Stan was convinced science fiction did not sell. When, some years before, Gene Roddenberry was trying to convince Lucille Ball to green light Star Trek, he convinced her by saying his script was really "a western in space". So is Star Wars. Roy Thomas was gradually winning Stan round. Then Lucas said that the rights to the comic would require no money upfront. Galton was won round by that argument and Stan finally agreed. Carmine Infantino would become one of the regular artists. The comic went on to become a massive bestseller and the film, well...

As for Marvel at the movies, Sub-Mariner and The Human Torch (both from Marvel Comics #1, 1939) were never made, but the live-action Spider-Man did appear (sometimes at the movies, for example in the UK, sometimes on TV) and The Incredible Hulk was actually a ratings success.

Another proposed movie was the Silver Surfer. Jack Kirby had returned to Marvel and Stan had proposed an original graphic novel of the character who had been flying around the Marvel Universe since 1966. The movie producers did not want to include the Fantastic Four, so Stan visited Jack in California and they put together a rewritten origin. Jack submitted his outline to the Writer's Guild in order to secure copyright in case the movie got made.

In Glasgow Stan was enthusiastic about the project, although he told me he was skeptical that they could produce the kind of special effects that an artist like Jack Kirby could conjure up with a few pencil strokes. However, Stan was hopeful that they had cast the Surfer's girlfriend, Shalla Bal – none other than Olivia Newton John (I told you she'd be back). The Surfer film never got made, but Olivia was outstanding in Grease in 1978, so she probably wasn't too worried.

Stan had been published in the lucrative newspaper strip field for a long time, beginning with scripts for Howdy Doody and My friend Irma in 1951. Then there was Mrs Lyon's Cubs with Joe Maneely. But on January 1977, he struck gold with the Spider-Man strip, licensed to the Register & Tribune Syndicate, with art by John Romita. Even Howard the Duck (allegedly at one of his lectures, Stan revealed he had never heard of the character) became a newspaper strip – and later a movie from the above-mentioned George Lucas.

Then there was Marvel UK. Stan's brother Larry Lieber was in charge at this time, packaging the British books from New York. They had decided to launch an original British superhero alongside all the reprints of their books. Thus was born Captain Britain – and a little seed which would eventually produce some wonderful stories from Alan Moore and Alan Davis. But despite Stan's enthusiasm for the character on his British tour, the original weekly was cancelled in 1977, but would resurface again, and again, and again.

The UK had a great variety of comics available in 1977. Girls' comics were the best sellers. From DC Thomson there was Mandy, Debbie, Bunty, Judy (had to be a girl's name ending in the sound "y"). But there was also Tammy, identified as the first of the "new-wave comics" by none other than Pat Mills.

TV Comic and Look In (which had wonderful artists) were long lasting comics based on TV characters. Topper and Beezer were still going strong alongside Dandy and Beano. Warlord (from 1974) and Battle (from 1975) delivered the war genre, and Roy of the Rovers had finally in 1976 been awarded his own football comic.

But all that punk music and rebellious films like Scum were bound to be reflected in the comics medium – and so was born Action in 1976. The establishment condemned what they did not understand and Action had to be cancelled in 1977.

But another cultural ingredient was added in the shape of this new science fiction film, Star Wars. British comics were about to change utterly. A terrible beauty was born. 2000AD was unleashed upon the world.

**AUTHOR:**
JOHN MCSHANE

# 1977 - TEN COMICS

10

## 2000 AD Prog 1

Cover by Kevin O'Neill. Invasion by Pat Mills, Jesus Blasco. Dan Dare by Pat Mills, Ken Armstrong, Massimo Belardinelli. Flesh by Pat Mills, Ken Armstrong, Boix. Harlem Heroes by Pat Mills, Tom Tully, Dave Gibbons. MACH-1 by Pat Mills, Enio. Publisher – IPC Magazines (UK)

2000 AD blasted into newsagents in February 1977, with editor Tharg (or Pat Mills) offering you not just a free space spinner but thrill-powered tales including an all-new Dan Dare, MACH-1, Invasion, Harlem Heroes, and Flesh. This debut Prog sold 220,000 copies and was very much the creation of Pat Mills, who either wrote or edited (and re-wrote) everything in this first Prog. 40+ years later, it's still the Galaxy's Greatest Comic!

09

## Ciao Magazine

Anthology
Publisher – Shogakukan (Japan)

Ciao Shōjo Manga magazine launched in launched in 1977 to compete with the existing Nakayoshi (launched 1954) and Ribon (launched 1955) magazines. Shōjo Manga, aimed at girls aged from eight to teens, is a huge part of the Manga market and Ciao is still going strong, bringing in new readers to comics with its circulation around half a million.

08

## Cerebus #1

By Dave Sim
Publisher – Aardvark Vanaheim (Canada)

Cerebus is a difficult comic and its creator Dave Sim is even more troubling. But one thing cannot be denied, Cerebus #1 is a milestone issue. Initially a simple Conan the Barbarian parody with the star of the comic an anthropomorphized aardvark barbarian. But the series soon developed way beyond that with Sim announcing very early on that he was going to produce 300 issues of Cerebus, telling the title characters life story. Cerebus went from barbarian to politician, prime-minister to Pope and then began a long descent to death. The 300th issue was published in 2004. Sim had created a work that is unrivalled in length, in scope, in ambition.

# YOU HAVE TO OWN

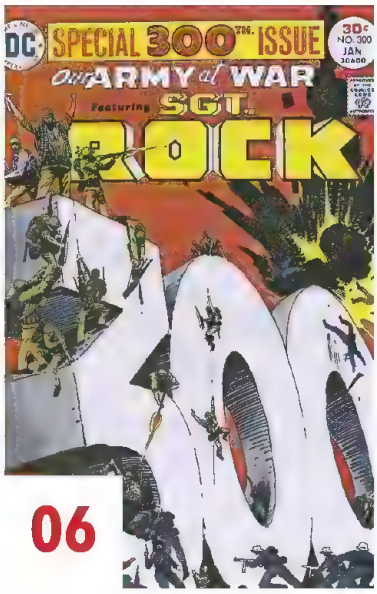
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
FIRST ISSUE!
Ms. MARVEL
ALL-OUT ACTION!
AT LAST! A BOLD NEW SUPER-HEROINE IN THE SENSE-STUNNING TRADITION OF SPIDER-MAN!

07

## Ms. Marvel #1

By Gerry Conway and John Buscema
Publisher – Marvel Comics (USA)

In 1977, the appearance of a new female superhero was a huge event, especially one pitched as progressive (the Ms. in her name and her in-story fight for gender equality). Little did Ms. Marvel's creators, Gerry Conway and John Buscema, know that she'd eventually become a Marvel movie mainstay and the most powerful of Marvel's cinematic heroes. Getting her powers from the original Captain Marvel (at least in the Marvel universe), the character would undergo many ups and downs, until assuming the mantle of Captain Marvel in 2012 and establishing herself as Marvel's premier female hero.

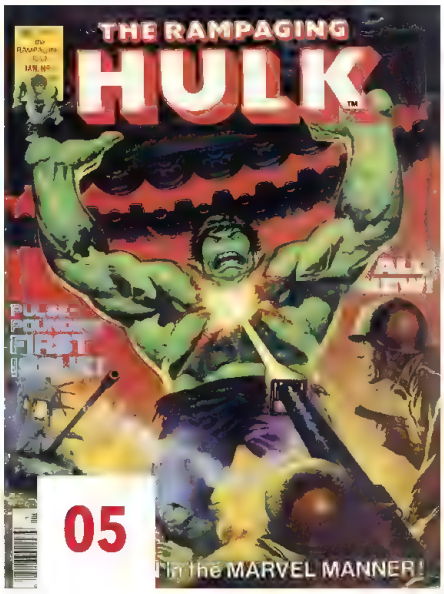



06

## Our Army At War #300

Written by Robert Kanigher, art by Joe Kubert, back-up strip art by Lee Elias
Publisher - DC Comics (USA)

Sgt. Rock had been the headliner here since 1959 and the title would be re-named Sgt.Rock from issue 302, but this 300th issue had a classic Rock strip, '300th Hill,' playing hard on the nature of combat, sacrifice, and the loss of war and containing the same stunning artwork from Joe Kubert that marked out Sgt. Rock as a very special DC Comic.




05

## Rampaging Hulk #1

Written by Doug Moench. Art by Walt Simonson, Alfredo Alcala. Cover by Ken Barr.
Publisher – Marvel Comics (USA)

The nine issues of Rampaging Hulk are essential comics for any fan of the Hulk, with some stunning black and white wash artwork from Walt Simonson, John Romita Jr., Keith Pollard, Herb Trimpe, Sal Buscema, on the green behemoth and beautiful fully painted covers from Ken Barr, Earl Norem, Jim Starlin.

> “Little did Ms. Marvel's creators, Gerry Conway and John Buscema, know that she'd eventually become a Marvel movie mainstay and the most powerful of Marvel's cinematic heroes.

# 1977 - TEN COMICS

04

## Rip Off Comix #1

Cover by Gilbert Shelton. The Parakeet that Outwitted the DEA by Joe Brown and Gilbert Shelton. The Case of Dr. Feelgood by Foolbert Sturgeon. Dopin' Dan and the Mysterious Stranger by Ted Richards. Wonder Wart-Hog goes on Welfare by Gilbert Shelton. Published by Rip Off Press (USA)

Describing itself as "Semi-Adult, Semi-Literature" on this first cover, Rip Off Press was a home to the very best Underground and Alternative artists for 30 issues over 15 years. Gilbert Shelton's Freak Brothers (fabulous and furry) found a home here alongside their own title, along with a who's who of the underground and alternative including Foolbert Sturgeon (Frank Stack), Bill Griffith, Harry Driggs, Dave Sheridan, Mary Fleener, Carol Lay, Nina Paley, Dori Seda, Spain Rodriguez, Trina Robbins, and Ted Richards.

03

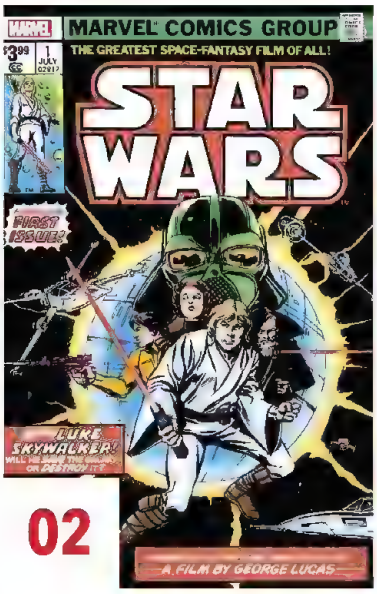
## Space Pirate Captain Harlock & Galaxy Express 999

By Leiji Matsumoto. Captain Harlock serialised in Play Comic 1977-1979. Galaxy Express 999 initially serialised in Weekly Shonen King. (Japan)

To start one classic example of space opera Manga is good for a creator, but to begin two in the same year - it's no wonder Matsumoto is acclaimed as a master of this particular type of Manga. He was already famous for the space opera Space Battleship Yamato (1974) and both Harlock and Galaxy Express 999 follow the same classic pattern whether that's Harlock the space pirate with a rebellious streak, fighting 'for no one's sake, only for something in his heart,' or the epic tale of Galaxy 999, where a young boy wants an indestructible machine body to live the life his mother could not and travels on the magnificent space train the Galaxy Express 999.

> “Matsumoto was already famous for the space opera Space Battleship Yamato (1974)

# YOU HAVE TO OWN




02

Star Wars #1

Written by Roy Thomas, art by Howard Chaykin.
Publisher - Marvel Comics (USA)

1977 was, of course, the year of Star Wars and Marvel Comics were quick off the mark with their Star Wars comic, the first six issues of which adapted the film. This first issue set up a series that gave Star Wars fans a monthly fix of the extended SW universe until 1986. And if you're lucky enough to have one of the rare 35-cent variants of this first Star Wars, the record sale for it (as of 2020) was $27,000. The normal 30-cents copy - around $1,000 with a record high of $3,500

01

X-Men #108

Written by Chris Claremont, art by John Byrne and Terry Austin. Cover by Dave Cockrum
Publisher – Marvel Comics (USA)

The beginning of THE classic run of Marvel Comics' X-Men, with introduction of Byrne and Austin as artists. X-Men became a true space opera title here, with such tales as The Starjammers, Shi'ar Imperial Guard, Proteus, The Hellfire Club, The Dark Phoenix Saga, Days of Future Past – all to come. During the run, Byrne began co-plotting with Claremont from #114 and created both Alpha Flight and Kitty Pryde during his essential run on the title, a run that would last until issue 143 in 1981 and would bring incredible success to the title and set the characters up as major stars in the Marvel Universe.

# FAN PICS
## MATTHEW ELLIS

# 1977 COMIC MUSEUM

## Comic artefacts, memorabilia and fandom

The first ever British comic convention was held, in Birmingham, in 1968 and began a sequence of conventions that would run, with some interruptions, until the late 1990s, when it would be succeeded by other conventions such as BICS and the Bristol comics conventions.

While the number of comics sold in 1977 was far higher, the number of opportunities to actually meet comics creators at conventions was far lower – compare that to the situation nowadays with far fewer comics sold but far more conventions for fans to attend. In fact 1977 provided fans with a rare opportunity to attend two conventions in a single year!

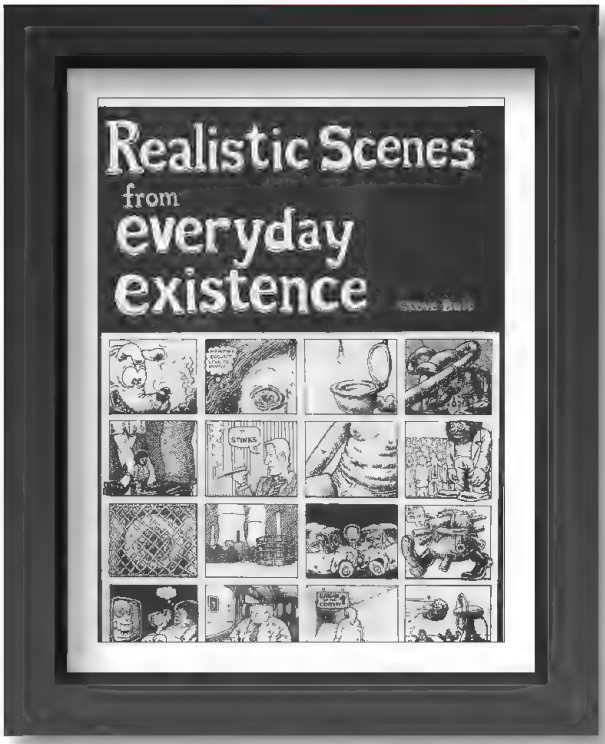
The 'usual' convention was held, in September 1977, at the Bloomsbury hotel in London and was the direct descendent of that first convention in Birmingham in 1968. However, before that, there was KAK. The (second and final) Konvention of Alternative Komix was held at the Air galleries in London, 29-31 July 1977. This brought together some of the leading protagonists in the underground comix movement – note the 'unusual' spelling denoting that these weren't comics for kids, these were something different, these were for grown-ups! This was a decade before the graphic novel / 'comics aren't just for kids anymore' boom that was occasioned by the publication of Watchmen and The Dark Knight Returns.

With a strong base at the Arts Lab Press in Birmingham several different titles were produced - such as 'Moon comix', 'Committed Comix' and 'Street comix' – often featuring early work by 'underground' creators such as Bryan Talbot, Hunt Emerson and Steve Bell. The souvenir comic produced to celebrate KAK 77 gathered together these talents in a 24 page limited edition (of 500) comic with a very dynamic Hunt Emerson (and Chris Welch) surfboarding artist cover. Bryan Talbot contributed a silent 2 page sci-fi strip entitled 'Committed' while Steve Bell (in the days before he was one of the country premier newspaper cartoonists) has a page entitled 'Realistic scenes from everyday existence' which, erm, has 16 panels showing some scenes from everyday existence, but not many.

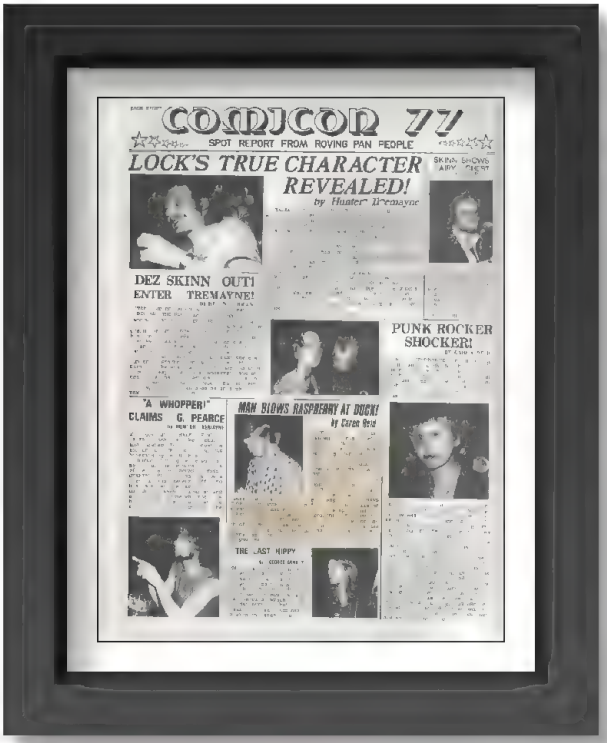
My favourite page is contributed by Bryan Talbot (or El Tolberto '77, as he signs it) and features a one-page strip showing a new wave, punk cartoonist breaking down a door, behind which sits a distinctly old school artist churning out work – the newcomer flicks out a pen and effectively challenges the old-stager to some sort of comic based duel, saying "Ah hear yore pretty fast..." – great stuff.

Further resources. Steve Bell is on twitter @BellBellToons. Hunt Emerson can be found at largecow.com. Bryan Talbot can be found at bryan-talbot.com. 'Comix – the underground revolution' (2004) by Dez Skinn, Such 'ar zak' on ebay for a selection of the underground titles mentioned. Check out the 'British underground comix' group on Facebook.

**AUTHOR:**
RICHARD SHEAF
@richardandsheaf



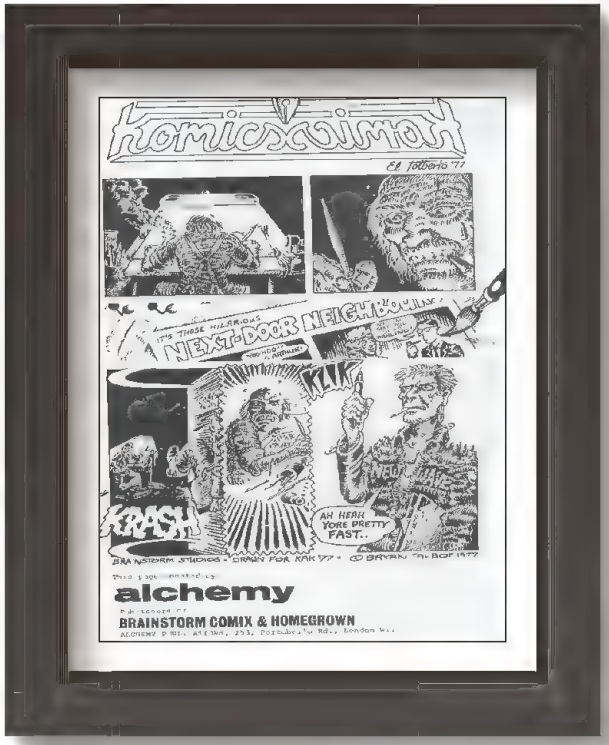

KAK 77 PAGE
BY STEVE BELL


COMICON 77
SPOT REPORT FROM ROVING PAN PEOPLE
LOCK'S TRUE CHARACTER REVEALED!
by Hunter Dreamyne
DEZ SKINN OUT! ENTER TREMAYNE!
PUNK ROCKER SHOCKER!
"A WHOPPER!" CLAIMS G. PEARCE
MAN BLOWS RASPBERRY AT DUCK!
THE LAST HIPPY

THE PANELOLOGIST
FROM COMICON 77

## FAN PICS

TOBY REEVE
AND HIS FIRST
EDITION OF
2000AD




BY BRYAN TALBOT
(OR EL TOLBERTO '77,
AS HE SIGNS IT)

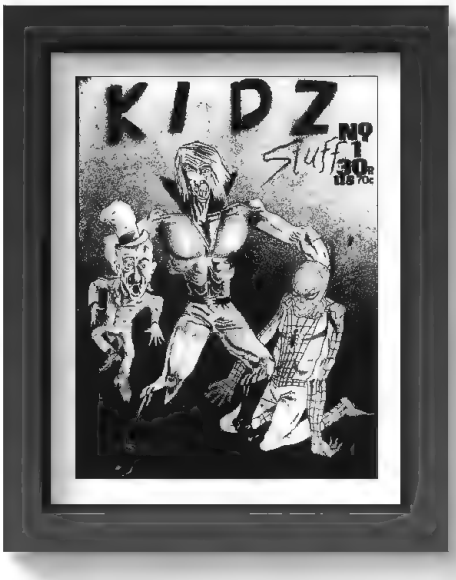
PRESS PREVIEW TICKET
FOR STAR WARS

THE (SECOND AND FINAL) KONVENTION OF ALTERNATIVE KOMIX WAS HELD AT THE AIR GALLERIES IN LONDON, 29-31 JULY 1977

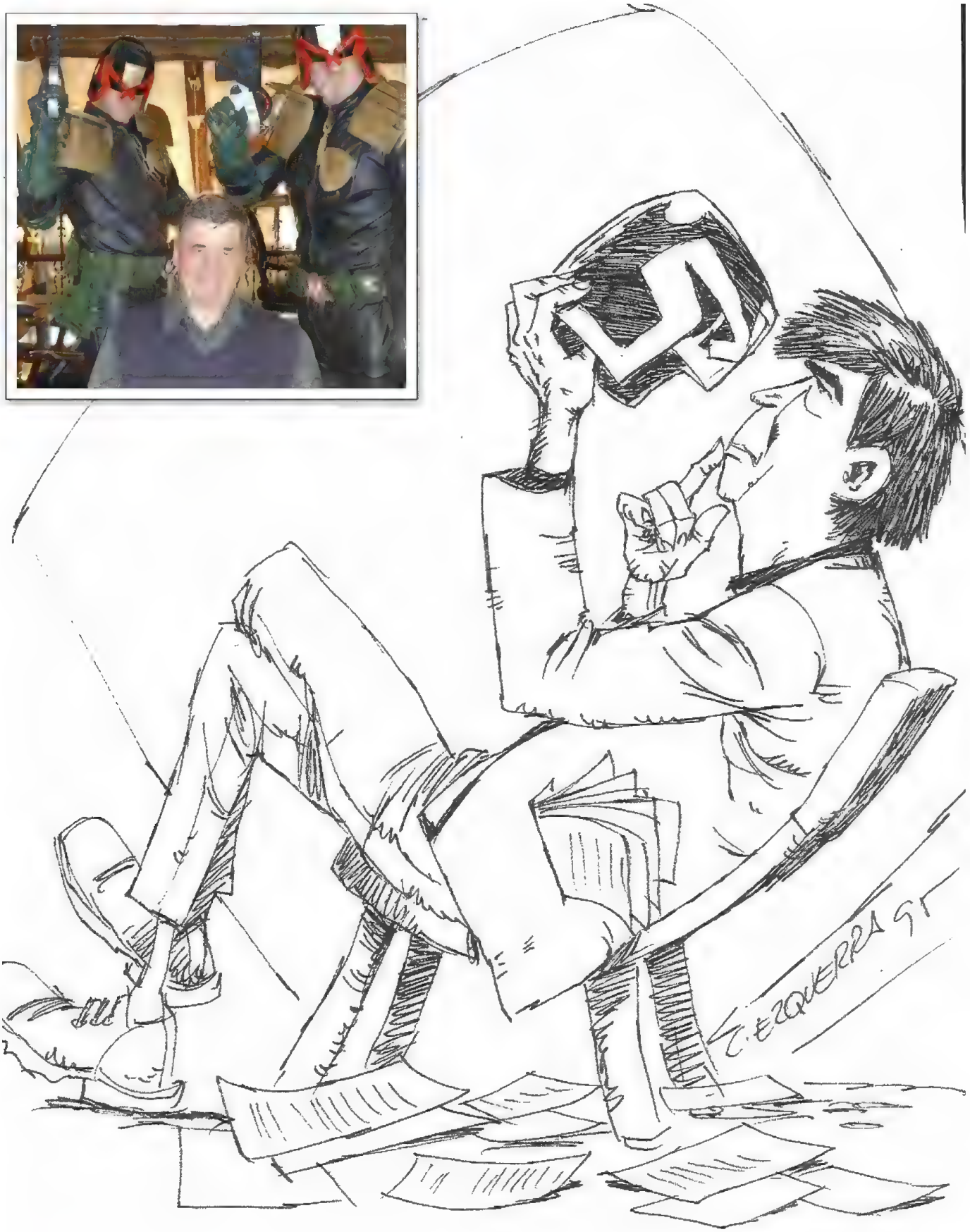
**HUNT EMERSON (AND CHRIS WELCH) SURFBOARDING ARTIST COVER**

## FAN PICS

BRIAN FLYNN WITH STARLORD AND 2000AD



## FAN PICS
## PETE FISHER


C. EZQUERRA 97

# JOHN WAGNER

## LIFE BEFORE 1977

***You left DC Thomson in 1971? Was that because the pay at IPC was better? Any other reasons?***

I think it was about time to leave. Money I suppose was at the heart of it. They didn't pay well at all and I found the conditions a little oppressive. Like I was a bit of a scruffbag and they insisted I do things like wear a tie and wash. And they declined to help me with a mortgage (quite wise of them in retrospect). Besides, I had seen a new future out there. I'd never really thought much about where I was heading, just been drifting since school, but I'd picked up a good basic training at Thomsons, learned a few lessons about writing, and the freelance life began to look very tempting. Even more so because Pat Mills, who worked with me at Thomsons, had decided to quit and try his hand. So in the end I joined him. I didn't actually get to IPC until a year later, when we split our partnership.

***There were still girls comics and humour comics in 1971; do you remember what you worked on?***

We did humour strips for Cor! and Whizzer and Chips, boys' strips for Lion and Valiant, and girls' strips for Tammy and Sandie, all IPC publications. We were fortunate to have as mentor John Purdie, the Managing editor of IPC Girls' Comics, who greased the slide for us quite a lot. We initially tried sending a strip to the DC Thomson comic Hotspur. They were less than keen on ex-employees at the time – don't know if things have changed – and would certainly never use them as freelancers, so we went to the trouble of sending our script in under a false name from an address in deepest England. We got back the most vitriolic rejection letter not only that I've had, but that I have ever seen. Did they figure out it was us? Or did they just really, really, really hate that script?

***Humour comics in the day relied on constant variations on a theme. It always seems to me that coming up with loads of stories where the characters never change must be incredibly difficult. Did you find that?***

It could be, especially with a character like Tomboy (in Cor!, I think). Tomboy's humour relied on misunderstanding. Tomboy would tell her mother she was growing pot plants, mum would twist herself up in delight at the thought of her daughter the horticulturist - only to discover Tomboy was growing marijuana and the cops had arrived to take her away (a plotline we weren't allowed to use). Every strip a different misunderstanding, it got pretty wearing and hard to come up with something new. Most of the humour in those comics relied on puns. That can get very wearing too.

***Were you aware of the work of Leo Baxendale? Did he have any influence on you?***

Sure, and Ken Reid too. Dudley Watkins in the Sunday Post. Great cartoonists. Doing stuff a cut above the rest.

"Everything began with a comic called Tammy. That was the beginning of what could be called the 'new-wave comics' ... It never had censorship problems because mental cruelty isn't visual on the page."(Pat, of course...) I think Gerry Finley-Day created it? Did you know him from Dundee? Tammy must have been a success because it lasted 1971-1984. You worked on a few strips for it. Some good artists, too.

That's a good quote from Pat, and so true. I believe Gerry did create Tammy, or at least had a major hand in it, with oversight no doubt from John Purdie. Gerry wasn't from DCT, but I can't actually remember his background, not sure it was even in journalism.

Our first story was called School of No Escape. It was a mystery story about a strange new headmistress who'd taken over a girls' school. Someone else had started the story and I think staff weren't sure what to do with it, so they gave it to us. We had a lot of fun with that story, learnt a few of the secrets of mystery story writing. It was quite popular. I used the headmistress's name recently as one of the baddies in Rok of the Reds. It's good to recycle.

We came up ourselves with School for Snobs, an archetypal girls' comic story about a rough, heavy-smoking, East End headmistress who 'sorted out' snobs. I only co-wrote a few of those with Pat before we split, and I left it to him. He was always a better girls' writer anyway, though girls' comics heavily informed what both of us did later.

***Back at DCT Bunty lasted 1958-2001. Did you ever work on that? Was DCT as good a place as its reputation has it for learning the craft of storytelling?***

I was an avid reader of Bunty in my youth. It was one of the comics my sister took, back in the 60s, along with Mandy, Judy and Diana. I thought they were better even than DCT's boys' comics, which I loved, though I never tried to reason why, and Bunty was the best. It was the emotional power, the cruelty, the stiletto so deftly – and quite often quite crudely – inserted. Strong stuff, but that's what Pat was getting at. No blood or gore, nothing to get the parents excited, but damned effective.

I was not DCT's biggest fan when I left, but over the years I've come to feel quite an affection for them. They taught me probably the most valuable lesson I've learnt as a writer, mainly because they

were so pernickety about everything. Second best wasn't good enough for them. So now when people ask me for tips that's my number 1 – Question everything you do. How can you improve it? Nothing you do can't be made better. Never be satisfied. Of course there comes a point where you have to be, where you have to say enough and send the bugger in. But it's a better approach to writing than self-satisfaction.

***In 1974 (?) you took over editorship of Valiant? Any memories of that comic? It ended in 1976, just after Battle was launched, so did you move over to Battle at that point?***

Ha ha, no. I had been living in the north of Scotland for a year, looking after a mansion and working at various jobs like labouring for Wimpey (lasted two days), working in a pipe coating factory for North Sea Oil (five days), and three months on a Dutch dredging barge, taking silt from the rig building site at Nigg on the Cromarty Firth. I liked that job. We'd often be ploughing along out into the North Sea with porpoises leaping alongside us. I was trying to give up journalism, but it didn't work. It was easier, I found, writing scripts than actually putting in a hard shift on a building site. So I'd not long left the mansion when I got a telegram from IPC – come on down, all is forgiven. Pat Mills had been tasked with creating a new war comic and he wanted me to work with him on it. That was in '74, Battle launched in March '75. A little while after that Dave Hunt and Steve MacManus took the helm at Battle and I wasn't needed anymore. I did a short spell as script editor for a new teen mag, then on to Valiant toward the end of '75, I think.

From the start Valiant bore the mark of death. I did what I could to improve it but even the best comics had a downward trajectory. Cover prices were low, so they required huge circulations by today's standards to keep them going. When sales approached break-even it was customary to merge one comic into another to give the survivor a circulation boost. Valiant was heading downwards and the only thing they could offer to merge with it was the reprint title Vulcan. I'm not sure Valiant got any uplift. I saw the writing on the wall and decided to get out. The freelance life was beckoning again. I'd had my fill of editing. It's bloody hard work. I could have toiled on Valiant 7 days a week, 24 hours a day and still not have turned out the comic I wanted. I longed to be able to concentrate on my own work again. It was hard enough just to get that right. I'm filled with admiration for editors like Dave Hunt and Steve Mac and Matt Smith who can do the job well. Too tough for this old turkey. I've kind of returned to editing again with the Rok books. That's just a single character, but it seems to take up a vast amount of my time.

***In 1971, Nasty Tales first made its appearance and introduced a lot of us to Crumb, Shelton, S. Clay Wilson, Spain etc. Was this your introduction to the Underground? Did it make you think that a more adult approach to comics was indeed possible? Who did you like among these cartoonists?***

I saw my first Nasty Tales in '72, I think, when I came down to London for the first time. I loved Crumb, loved his art and the whole stoned, psychedelic feel. Mr Natural and my personal favourite Bobo Bolinski. I named my cat Bobo after him.

> “I mean, I like Batman – **he's one of the few standard US characters I do like** – but you have to admit it's hard to take him seriously.

Shelton was pretty good too. There was also – as in all comics – a lot of dross, but you could say that about any art form.

I suppose everything you read has a certain influence on you, you take what you can from it, but I don't think I started thinking about the comic form in any deeper sense – as opposed to just doing it – till I read Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's Batman Year One (first serialised in 1987). That book opened my eyes to the possibilities of strip. Miller's script was so grown up, so intelligent, so nicely judged. This wasn't throwaway, as I admit I was inclined to think of the genre, but something to cherish, to keep on your shelf along with other great literature. And he did it with a character like Batman too. I mean, I like Batman – he's one of the few standard US characters I do like – but you have to admit it's hard to take him seriously.

***In 1976, Marvel launched original strips in the UK with Captain Britain and Stan Lee came over to do a massive promotional tour. Were you aware of Marvel's stuff? Did you get to meet Stan?***

I was never a fan of US style comics, so wasn't particularly aware of what Marvel UK were doing till after 2000AD came out. Later on I did the Chronicles of Genghis Grimtoad (with Alan Grant and Ian Gibson) for them, but that only lasted one series in the magazine called Strip. I met Stan one evening at their offices at Temple, a very affable, likeable fellow. I told him, when we shook hands, that I'd not be able to wash mine again. He said the same -- but I'm sure we both quite sensibly did.

***There did seem to be a lot happening in comics in 1976-77. Lots of new artists were appearing. Who did you look forward to working with? Did you get your own choice of artist, or were you too busy concentrating on the story?***

We had used so many Continental and South American artists at DCTs that I went down to London thinking that not that many Brits could actually draw comics. We used a good few foreigners on Battle too. So it was very refreshing on 2000AD to see so many young, very able and in many cases extremely exciting British artists coming on board.

I did tend to concentrate on the story and leave the choice of artist to editorial. There were one or two I wasn't keen on but mainly they put the right people on Dredd. It was always a pleasure to check out what they'd done with a story. And there was Carlos Ezquerra, of course, who I'd been working with since Battle and who I regarded as an honorary Brit. Later on, especially after Alan Grant had joined me, we tended to gear stories to particular artists – ones we particularly liked working with, like Cam Kennedy.

***The Comics Journal started in 1977. Did you ever read it? Were you aware of the comics fanzines?***

A bit, but not much. Though I liked comics, especially the ones I'd read as a boy, I wasn't really into the whole 'comics' thing. I was never that sure for the first ten years or so if I was even going to remain in the business. But I'm a bit of a lazy sod, don't really have that much ambition, and so I just drifted on and on until...well, here I am.

***Did you go and see Star Wars? Did you like it?***

Yup. Loved it. C3PO and R2D2 annoyed the hell out of me – they could have done much better with the robots. But otherwise it was great. I've not paid that much attention to the sequels.

***One of the best TV shows, possibly ever, began in 1976. I, Claudius. Did you watch it when it was first broadcast? Violence and humour and complex characters do seem like your strengths.***

It was superb, some great performances. I was just reminded recently that Christopher Biggins played Nero. I had forgotten but he did a fine job. John Hurt as Caligula was brilliant, and was it Sian Phillips that played Livia? Yes, it was, she was such a good villain. It's a book I often recommend to people if they're looking for something to read. One of the few I've been able to read more than twice.

***Did you consider that your strips could have a life in other media? TV, movies, toys, collections...***

I bloody hope so, John. I ain't got no pension, me. I've always hoped that my intellectual properties would see me through old age and into the home. So far so good. And that's extremely good news about the Judge Dredd Experience opening next year.

***Did you attend the SSI meetings? Did you go to any conventions?***

I went to one SSI meeting and attended a few conventions, but I always wondered what the hell I was doing there – until, only fairly recently, I discovered retail. It's good to be able to earn a little, pay for my time, but I like it as much for being someplace I can park myself, meet fans and old friends, have a chat. I have noticed, though, that since the lockdown I've been feeling a lot healthier and less tired for not attending Cons. They can wear you down - all the travelling, lugging things around, cold draughty halls, not sleeping in your own bed. If they start up again and I feel that it's safe to attend I'll do a few more – I'll have Rok the God to foist on the public – but I won't keep on forever.

***What was the first award you won for your comics writing? When would that have been?***

I think it was 78 or 79, I think it was the revived Eagles. Best writer. I came third. John Howard was first, and TB Grover came second. [In case you're the person who doesn't know: these are all the same person...]

***Looking back at 1977, do you have happy memories of that time?***

Yes, I think that was the year I left London. I've pretty much lived out in the sticks ever since.

**AUTHOR:**
JOHN MCSHANE

No.1
2000 A.D.
FREE
FEATURING THE NEW
Dan Dare
PROGRAMME 1
DATELINE 26 FEB 77
IN ORBIT EVERY SATURDAY
8p
EARTH MONEY
SPACE SPINNER
M.A.C.H.1
HIS INCREDIBLE HYPER-POWER WILL AMAZE YOU!
SPACE-AGE DINOSAURS!
FLESH
TOP THRILL!
GREAT BRITAIN INVADED!

No.2
2000 A.D.
PROGRAMME 2
DATELINE 05 MAR 77
IN ORBIT EVERY SATURDAY
8p
EARTH MONEY
Featuring the NEW DAN DARE
FREE INSIDE!
BE A BIONIC MAN WITH THESE FANTASTIC FULL-COLOUR STICKERS!
AIEEEEEE! It's... the THING from the HELL PLANET!

No.3
2000 A.D.
PROGRAMME 3
DATELINE 12 MAR 77
IN ORBIT EVERY SATURDAY
8p
EARTH MONEY
TOP THRILL!
FLESH
FREE
FIGHT THE INVADERS WITH THIS TOP SECRET GIFT!
INSIDE!
RED ALERT
SHOOT ME, BOSS! DON'T LET IT EAT ME ALIVE!

Better than Super Heroes, we've got the... HYPER HEROES!
NEW
2000 A.D.
8p
EARTH MONEY
LOGAN'S FORCE FIELD HAS FAILED AND HE NOW WEIGHS 2,500 TONS! JUPITER'S GRAVITY IS CRUSHING HIM TO A D...
WHO IS THE TERROR BARON OF DINOSAUR CITY?
FLESH
M.A.C.H.1
TRAINED TO KILL - BY A COMPUTER!

# NEW ADVENTURES IN SCI-FI...

## THE STRANGE BIRTH OF 2000AD & JUDGE DREDD

In February 1977, a strange and exciting newcomer joined the familiar likes of The Beano, The Dandy, Buster, Whizzer and Chips, Whoopee!, Tiger, TV Comic, Beezer, Topper, Krazy and all the many other titles then **engaged in the ongoing battle to capture and maintain children's attention** on the stands of the newsagents of Britain.

With the cover dominated by 'Programme 1's' free gift, a 'space spinner' (otherwise known as 'a frisbee'), only the peripheries of the cover of the new comic were left available to advertise the exciting contents which lay within. Curiously, though despite the cover price of 8p being advertised in 'Earth money' (with an alternative '13g' offered for any readers on the planet Mercury), there was no mention yet at least on the cover of the new title being 'the Galaxy's Greatest Comic' even though the comic's alien editor, Tharg the Mighty made his debut appearance in an image behind the frisbee, sorry, Space Spinner itself. But the new comic was, of course, 2000AD.

### BACK TO THE FUTURE?

It had been December 1975, when Kelvin Gosnell, a young sub-editor, working in IPC's competition's department, first suggested his employers might want to produce a new science-fiction title. "I was a science-fiction fan," he recalled later. "I thought we've got a war comic, and other themed comics, why not a science-fiction comic?" Gosnell drew attention to the recent success of the James Caan future sport film, Rollerball and the approaching release of several other major science fiction movies, namely Westworld, Logan's Run, Steven Spielberg's follow-up to Jaws, Close Encounters of the Third. There was also another film scheduled from George Lucas, the young director behind the recent nostalgic hit, American Graffiti: Star Wars.

Gosnell, in time, would be the second man to embody the role of Tharg's living human representative on Earth, becoming editor of 2000AD in 1977 and 1978 as well as of its short-lived sister titles, Starlord and Tornado. For now, most of the stories in Prog 1 were to be devised by one man: 2000AD's first editor and the person who probably more than anyone else may be said to have fathered the new comic: Pat Mills. Still, in his twenties, Mills had already been behind two successful recent comic launches, war comic Battle (1975) and the controversial Action (1976). Though he did not consider himself a sci-fi fan and certainly was not keen on either Prog 1's first cover or the Space Spinner, it was Mills who devised most of the content for that first issue.

### COVER STORY

Fuelled by a TV advertising campaign which emphasised the return of post-war comics icon, Dan Dare and, of course, that space spinner, 2000AD got off to flying start selling 350,000 copies. And little wonder: the cover promised much.

There was M.A.C.H-1 ("his incredible hyper-power will amaze you!"). Originally to be called 'Probe,' after its main character, John Probe, (the name was wisely changed), the story of a secret agent who has volunteered to have his body surgically enhanced, M.A.C.H 1 is perhaps too easily forgotten today. Although undeniably a

more violent rip-off of TV's Six Million Dollar Man and quickly went off the boil, it was the comic's most popular story in its first two months. "We owe 2000AD's initial success to M.A.C.H-1," Mills has said.

Then there were the 'space age dinosaurs' of Flesh, a story which ensured rampaging dinosaurs would become as familiar a feature of 2000AD's early covers as sharks had on the front of the earlier Action comic. The subject matter of Invasion! was also alluded to on the cover ('Stop press! Great Britain invaded!'). The only story set anywhere near the actual year 2000, the story saw lorry driver Bill Savage combatting an occupying force from the Volgan Empire in 1999. Although the fictional Volgans had been chosen as a last-minute substitute for the then real-life Soviet Union as the story's invading force, the story nevertheless provoked criticism from sci-fi author Michael Moorcock as well as The Guardian newspaper. One scene saw Lady Shirley Brown being gunned down on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral.

Any parents concerned about potentially violent content might have been reassured by the presence of a familiar name in the form of a revived version of The Eagle's post-war space hero, Dan Dare. If so, they were probably wrong. Although, as mentioned, publicity about the new Dan Dare helped get 2000AD off to a spectacularly successful start, the new Dare never really caught the popular imagination. It was also (along with future sport epic, Harlem Heroes, which for some reason wasn't mentioned at all on Prog 1's cover) about as violent as the rest of the comic anyway.

The new comic's title, 2000AD, was, of course, a date then still 23 years in the future. As the comic became more established, the question was frequently raised on 2000AD's letters' page, Tharg's Nerve Centre: "what will 2000AD be called in the year 2000?" As it turned out, 2000AD would turn out to be one of only a handful of 1977's British comics to still be in existence at the start of the 21st century and one of an even smaller number (alongside veteran war comic, Commando and the now octogenarian Beano) to be still being produced and read another full twenty or more years after that. And it's still called 2000AD.

But nobody knew that then and the potential long-term obsolescence of the new comic's name hardly seemed like a major concern. The British comics' industry was, after all, a cutthroat business. The previous year alone had seen five titles (Monster Fun, Diana, Cracker, Hornet and Valiant) all winking out of existence while two more (Sparky and Action) would cease to exist by the end of 1977. 2000AD would be doing very well to make it even to the year 1980, let alone to 2000 AD itself.

## BETTER DREDD THAN DREAD

At least as interesting as the stories, Pat Mills put forward for the first issue were the ones which didn't quite make it. Death Bug was intended to be a disaster story about a group of humans who can set humans alight while Shako (perhaps similar to the later Stephen King shaggy dog story Cujo) was to be about a killer polar bear.

> "Taking its name from a Jamaican reggae artist of the time, **Mills' story was a dark tale of Stonehenge, Satanists, black magic and the occult** inspired by the novels of Dennis Wheatley.

Other stories missed the big launch itself but managed to arrive later. Originally conceived as a possible sidekick to the new Dan Dare, The Visible Man, about an unfortunate character whose vital organs become permanently publicly exposed after his car collides with a tanker containing radioactive material eventually appeared in 2000AD a year later. Bermuda Triangle outcasts saga Planet of the Damned, also arrived later than scheduled, finally appearing as the weakest entry in the line-up of 2000AD's short-lived sister title, Starlord, also in 1978.

Then there was Judge Dread...

Taking its name from a Jamaican reggae artist of the time, Mills' story was a dark tale of Stonehenge, Satanists, black magic and the occult inspired by the novels of Dennis Wheatley. It was not so much an earlier version of the Judge Dredd we know today as a completely different idea with a similar name. When Mills' idea was rejected, John Wagner asked Mills' permission to use the name (slightly amended to avoid confusion with the musician) for his new future Dirty Harry-like cop story set in New York. As with most of 2000AD's opening line-up, this version of Judge Dredd was initially planned to set in the near future, appropriate to a comic titled '2000AD.' The far-flung fantasy scenarios set in distant futures and remote alien worlds which would become a staple of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic generally came later.

What transformed Judge Dredd were the spectacular visuals of Dredd's city produced by Spanish artist, Carlos Ezquerra. Although Wagner was initially unimpressed by Ezquerra's early designs for Dredd himself, both he and Mills were blown away by Ezquerra's inspiring vision of a massive, never-ending sprawling metropolis. It was a vision far more futuristic than they had originally intended but the concept of Mega City One and a Judge Dredd story initially set in the year 2099 grew from there.

## VIOLENCE IS GOLDEN

The concept of a character who stood four-square for law and order also served a useful function at a dangerous time.

The birth of 2000AD occurred almost entirely in the shadow of Action, a comic whose own story served as a cautionary tale to the new title. Though a big success on its 1976 launch, a tabloid-fuelled moral panic over its violent content led it to be briefly withdrawn from sale in October of that year. By the time it returned in December 1976, any edge it had ever had had been severely blunted as content deemed unnecessarily violent had been excised. With sales plummeting, Action staggered on for another year, eventually ending six months or so after 2000AD's February 1977 launch.

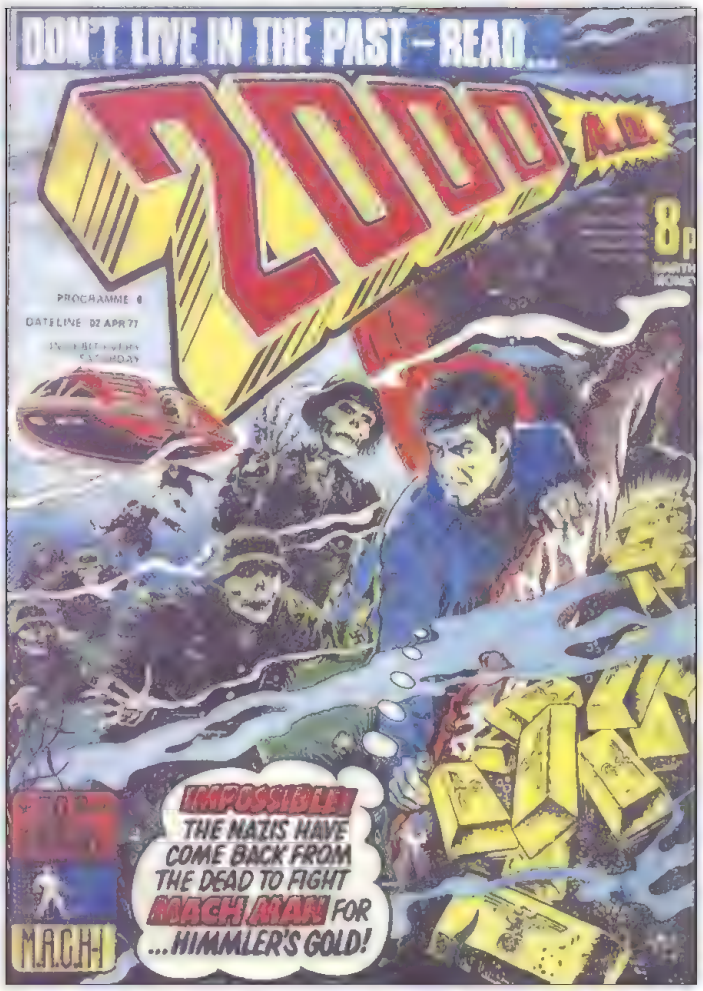
"We lost Action because they said it was violent and too amoral with the violence," publisher John Sanders argued. "I had a better idea – we should produce a comic in which the violence was done on the side of justice. The people who were getting it really deserved it and they were getting it from the law. Judge Dredd would be our answer to the critics of Action. He could be as violent as hell and no one could say a thing because his critics were hideous people who didn't deserve to be alive." In time, the complex relationship between Dredd's heroic status and the brutal and fascistic tendencies of both the man himself and the system he upheld, became one of the story's most interesting features.

At this point, however, both 2000AD and Judge Dredd were almost destroyed before they even began. Mills and Wagner discovered the comic was intended to remain strictly in-house with the rights to all characters, stories and ideas remaining with the publishers not the creators. At this point, creators received no public acknowledgement all credit for their work. Outraged, John Wagner walked away from the whole thing. "John left and was right to do so," Mills recalled later. "I think he felt betrayed and I think that was true." Mills threatened to walk too, only relenting when the publisher offered him a then massive fee to stay on and develop the project alone. "Because I was being paid such a large sum it made me work even harder," Mills recalled later. "Otherwise, I'd have felt so guilty if it bombed."

A consequence was that the very first Judge Dredd strips to appear ended up being created by a strange mishmash of writers and artists. Particularly surprising is that the very first Dredd story, Judge Whitey which debuted in Prog 2 was largely written by an unknown writer, Peter Harris, who reportedly worked as an accountant as his day job and who never returned to the strip again. Gerry Finley-Day who would later create The VCs and Rogue Trooper, also wrote some very early Dredd scripts.

A more serious consequence was the fact that Mike McMahon drew the very first Dredd strip to be published, not the artist who had originated the story. Carlos Ezquerra was enraged. "In the first story I developed the major visual elements of Dredd – his uniform, his bike and gun, even the Mega-City! Imagine my surprise when I saw issue two and found another artist had drawn the first Dredd story to be published." Ezquerra was particularly angry as he had already produced a number of

2000 A.D.
8p
★TOP★ THRILL
JUDGE DREDD
THE COMICS OF TOMORROW —TODAY!
DREDD'S ATTACKING THE CYBORG! BUT HE'LL GO OVER THE EDGE AND WE'RE TWO MILES UP!


DON'T LIVE IN THE PAST – READ...
2000 A.D.
8p
PROGRAMME 6
DATELINE 02 APR 77
IMPOSSIBLE!!
THE NAZIS HAVE COME BACK FROM THE DEAD TO FIGHT MACH MAN FOR ...HIMMLER'S GOLD!
M.A.C.H.1

Who can tear a building to shreds with his bare hands?
ANSWER INSIDE...
2000 A.D.
8p
EARTH MONEY
DARE
THE BUGS FROM PLANET ZIRCON ARE ON THE RAMPAGE FOR THEIR MAIN FUEL SUPPLY ...EARTHMEN!
★TOP★ THRILL
DAN DARE

2000 A.D.
8p
EARTH MONEY
BY STOMM! NOW THEY'RE EVEN GROWING LAW-BREAKERS IN MEGA-CITY 1!
GREAT 2000 A.D. T-SHIRT OFFER!

“But Dredd would never take over the comic. Although he ceased to be editor in 1977, as the man behind Nemesis the Warlock, the ABC Warriors and Slaine, **Pat Mills also continued to be an absolutely essential force** within 2000AD.

completed Dredd stories ready for us and by the fact McMahon seemed to have been instructed to closely emulate Ezquerra's own style. He refused to draw Dredd again for five years.

He did not, however, abandon 2000AD, producing virtually all of Johnny Alpha's early adventures in the subsequent mutant bounty hunter saga Strontium Dog both before and after it moved from Starlord in 1978. He also drew The Stainless Steel Rat stories adapted from US sci-fi author Harry Harrison's books by the man who had had the idea for 2000AD in the first place, Kelvin Gosnell before returning to Dredd in style with perhaps its greatest ever mega-epic, the sensational Apocalypse War in 1982. On his death in 2018, Carlos Ezquerra was widely acknowledged as one of the greatest of the many talented artists to illustrate Judge Dredd.

## PROGMANIA

As the 1970s moved into the 1980s, both Judge Dredd and 2000AD went from strength to strength. Although Pat Mills wrote several crucial early Dredd stories such as The Return of Rico and The Cursed Earth saga, the return of John Wagner proved crucial to the strip. From Wagner's early Robot Wars story onwards, it was Wagner, often accompanied by his writing partner, Alan Grant who produced the vast majority of Dredd's adventures in the years ahead. The same was true of Wagner and Grant's other strips, the witty and inventive Sam Slade: Robohunter, the more sombre Strontium Dog (perhaps the only character to seriously rival Dredd in stature) and the zany likes of Ace Trucking Company.

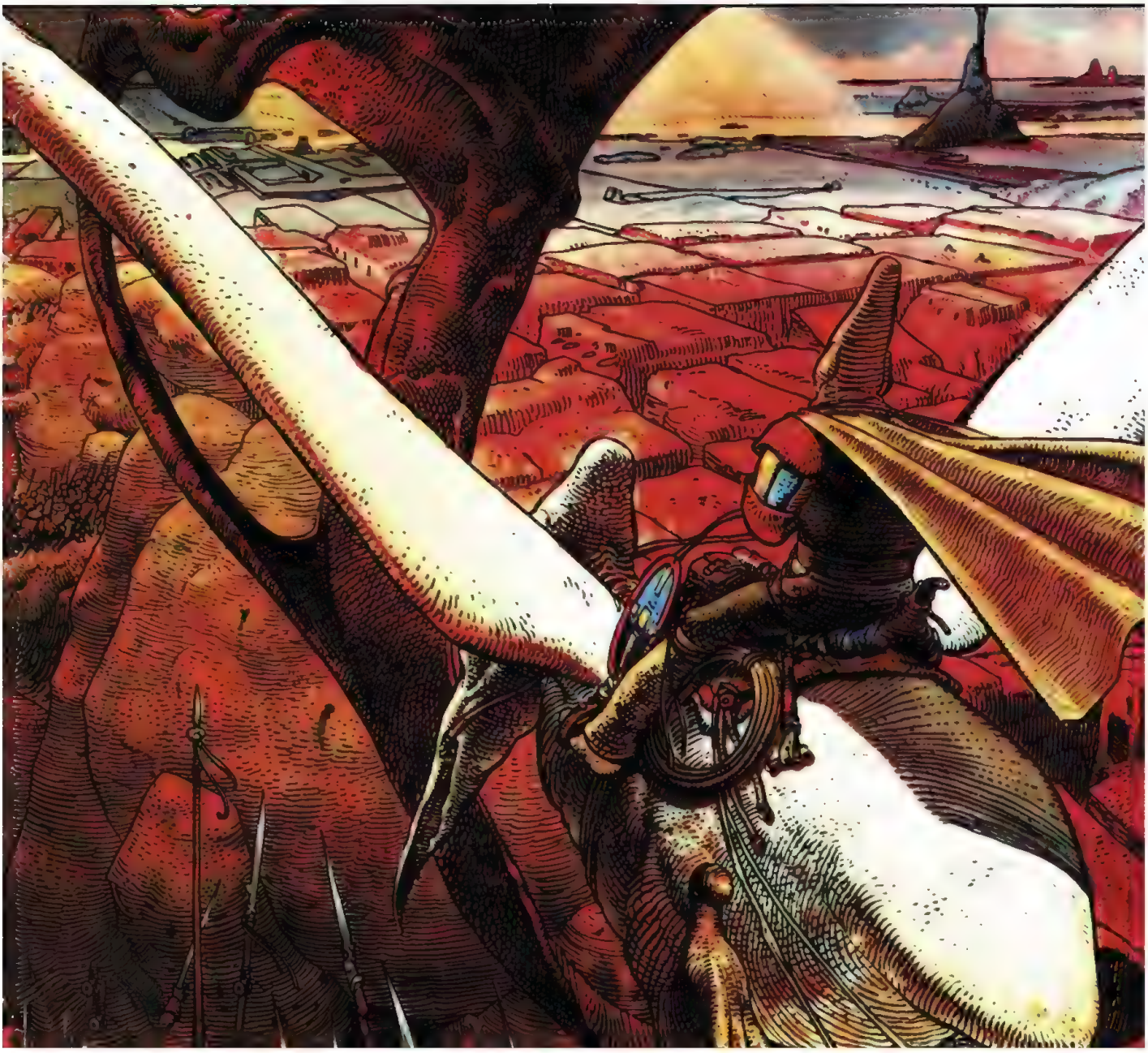
By 1980, with the revived Dan Dare having taken an early exit, Judge Dredd's supremacy seemed unrivalled. His name even came to form a permanent part of the logo ('Featuring Judge Dredd') and in time he would star in newspaper strips, board games, annuals, megazines and even movies of his own.

But Dredd would never take over the comic. Although he ceased to be editor in 1977, as the man behind Nemesis the Warlock, the ABC Warriors and Slaine, Pat Mills also continued to be an absolutely essential force within 2000AD.

The four decades or so since 1977 have seen a roll call of great stories (Halo Jones, Zenith, Bad Company, Mazeworld) far too long to adequately detail here. 2000AD's life since the year 2000 has now endured almost as long as its 23 years before it. It is an incredible legacy, more than half as long as The Beano and more than twice as long as the original Eagle. It would have seemed unthinkable back in February 1977.

**AUTHOR:**
CHRIS HALLAM

# HEAVY METAL™



# HEAVY METAL 1977

The "Adult Illustrated Fiction Magazine" Heavy Metal celebrated its 300th issue in 2020, some **43 years since the publication of its very first issue**. And for those four decades and more, Heavy Metal has been the publisher of some of the most visionary comics artists ever seen.

It's brought the names of some of the greatest fantasy artists and illustrators to English-speaking comics fans across the world and become, over the years, the leading American fantasy and sci-fi comics magazine.

But in the early years at least, everything that was Heavy Metal would come from the Métal Hurlant (literally either Screaming or Howling Metal), the French magazine that – in terms of its influence – would transform the world through those who saw it, loved it, and were affected by it.

*"In 1977, I came across the comics and publications born out of the Métal Hurlant magazines. In the same year, I was offered Alien, and I recognised the [...] influences I could apply to the visual aspects of the film.' RIDLEY SCOTT - director Alien, Blade Runner.*

The number of visionary artists, writers, producers, directors, creators, architects, or just anyone who ever read something from the pages of Métal Hurlant or Heavy Metal and found themselves inspired in some way is immeasurable. Just a small sampling of the names and creations that have the magazines in their creative DNA include Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott, William Gibson, George Lucas, Hayao Miyazaki, Luc Besson, Katsuhiro Otomo, Star Wars, Blade Runner, Neuromancer, Mad Max – they all took something from the world of imaginative genius and comics revolution found in both Heavy Metal and Métal Hurlant.

The very first issue of Heavy Metal, published in April 1977, came about because of the work of five men. Firstly, the quartet who made up Les Humanoïdes Associés (United Humanoids), two of the greatest Euro-comics makers of all time, Moebius and Philippe Druillet, along with journalist/writer/organiser Jean-Pierre Dionnet and financial director Bernard Farkas. They'd already created and published Métal Hurlant in France since December 1974 and were looking at getting the magazine reprinted and published in English and in America. And that's where the fifth man, Leonard Mogel, came in. He already published National Lampoon in the USA and had first seen the potential of Métal Hurlant when he'd been in France to promote the launch of a French National Lampoon. By 1977 the deal had been done and the new HMRC Communications, Inc. was ready to put out the very first Heavy Metal issue.

It could have been very different however. Because some time earlier, as Les Humanoïdes Associés had been courting various publishers in the USA looking to publish Métal Hurlant. And amazingly, one of those was Marvel Comics, at least according to Jim Shooter - *"Before the publication of Heavy Metal, Metal Hurlant came to Marvel seeking an American publisher. And after they did their presentation, we had a talk and Stan [Lee] thought that the stuff was too violent, too sexy and that good ol' sanitized Marvel couldn't do that. We thought he was crazy. But he was afraid that Marvel would get bad headlines, too violent, all that." JIM SHOOTER (Former EIC Marvel Comics – interviewed at Comic Book Resources, 2000)*

At the time, Marvel was in a precarious position financially, with sales dropping and a comic industry contraction in the USA hitting hard. In fact, Shooter's gone on record several times to state that it was the success of the Marvel Star Wars comic from 1977 onwards that turned the company around. If they'd have managed to get the Métal Hurlant deal, it may well have worked for them financially, but it's highly doubtful that what would become Heavy Metal would be the success it was/is and would have survived, artistically unchallenged, for so long.

Having secured the publishing deal, US readers finally got a chance to see the sorts of material that had been amazing European readers for a couple of years when Heavy Metal Volume 1 Issue 1 appeared on newsstands and in specialist shops in the spring of 1977 (it was cover dated April 1977). One thing that made the deal of publishing the magazine, with its glossy full-colour pages, was that the art had already been prepped and shot in France, making it a much cheaper production than it looked. And it looked spectacular, behind that stunning first

issue cover from Jean-Michel Nicollet, establishing what would, at least after the first few years, be shorthand for Heavy Metal – the magazine with the sexy scantily clad women and robots on the cover.

Because yes, as time went on, you could see from the covers that the sexy robo-girl imagery became something of a representative look for Heavy Metal. Or, as Grant Morrison put it when he took over as editor in chief in 2017 (from issue 280) – it became ***"the equivalent of a Mötley Crüe video, with huge breasts and spaceships."***

And that's certainly true of quite a lot of the material in Heavy Metal, especially when we get past the initial few years. But although there was eroticism, nudity, and sexiness in there for sure, there was also the chance for the English speaking world in general and America in particular to experience incredible, transformative, spectacular artwork from the likes of Moebius/ Jean Girard, Philippe Druillet, Enki Bilal, Serge Clerc, Nicole Clavelous, Milo Manara, Frank Margerin, Masse, Caza, Chantal Montellier, Jacques Tardi, Guido Crepax, Milo Manara, Philippe Caza, Jean-Claude Forest, Liberatore – and we could very easily go on and on with the list of stunning artists.

Which brings us to the second problem for Heavy Metal. Alongside the tendency to pack the pages with nudity and a poor representation of women, there was also a particularly heavy leaning towards ART in Heavy Metal early on. Yes, so much of that early material is visually stunning and innovative, but it's also a little... well, out-there would be a polite way of saying it. At times it would be perhaps more accurate to say it was simply incomprehensible stream of consciousness stuff from a load of older gentlemen without the benefits of many modern-day sensibilities who were also a little too fond of mind-altering drugs?

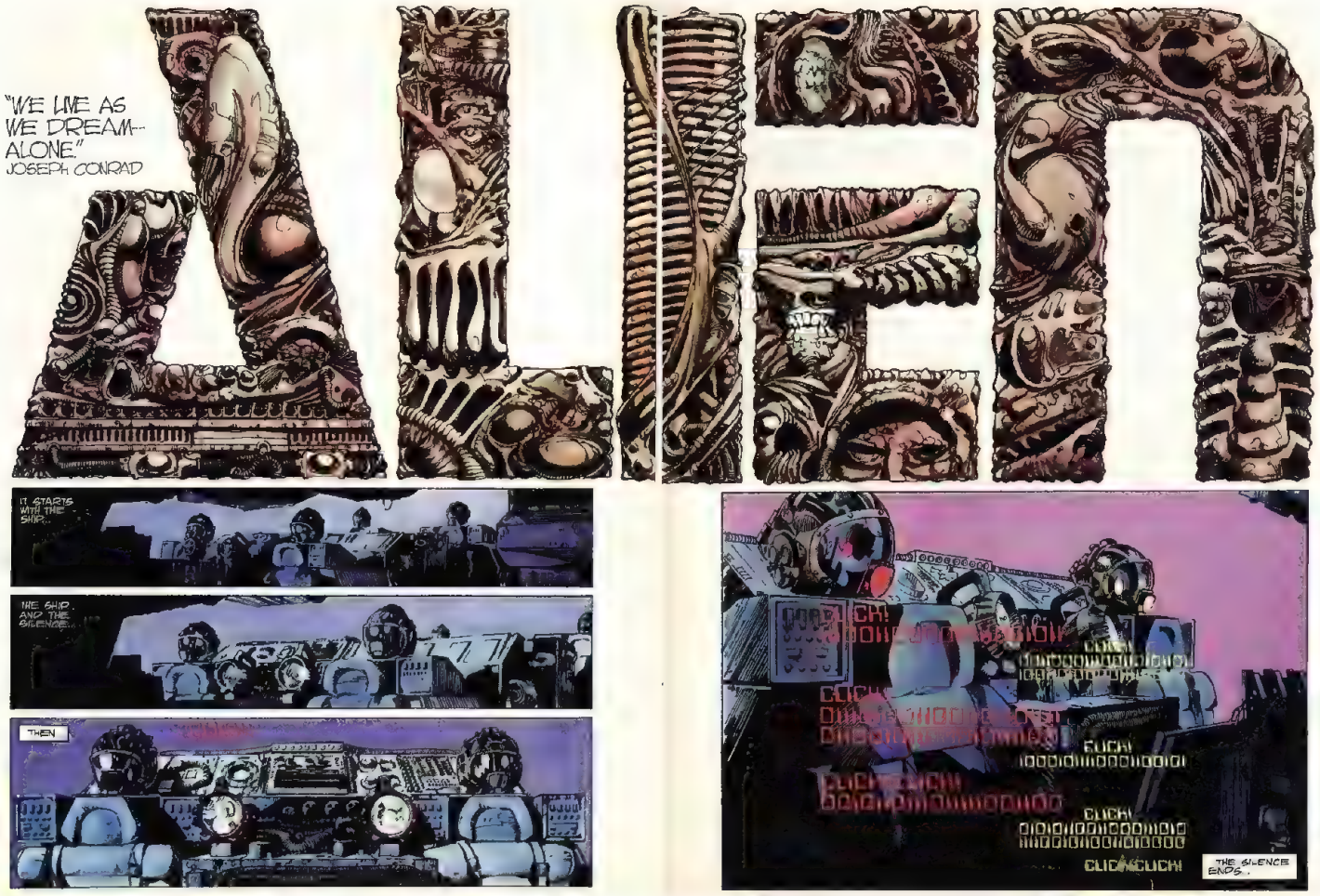
Or, perhaps we should just let Alan Moore tell you ...

***"I'd like to see an adult magazine that didn't predominantly feature huge tits, spilled intestines or the sort of brain-damaged acid-casualty gibbering that Heavy Metal is so fond of."*** *ALAN MOORE, May 1981*

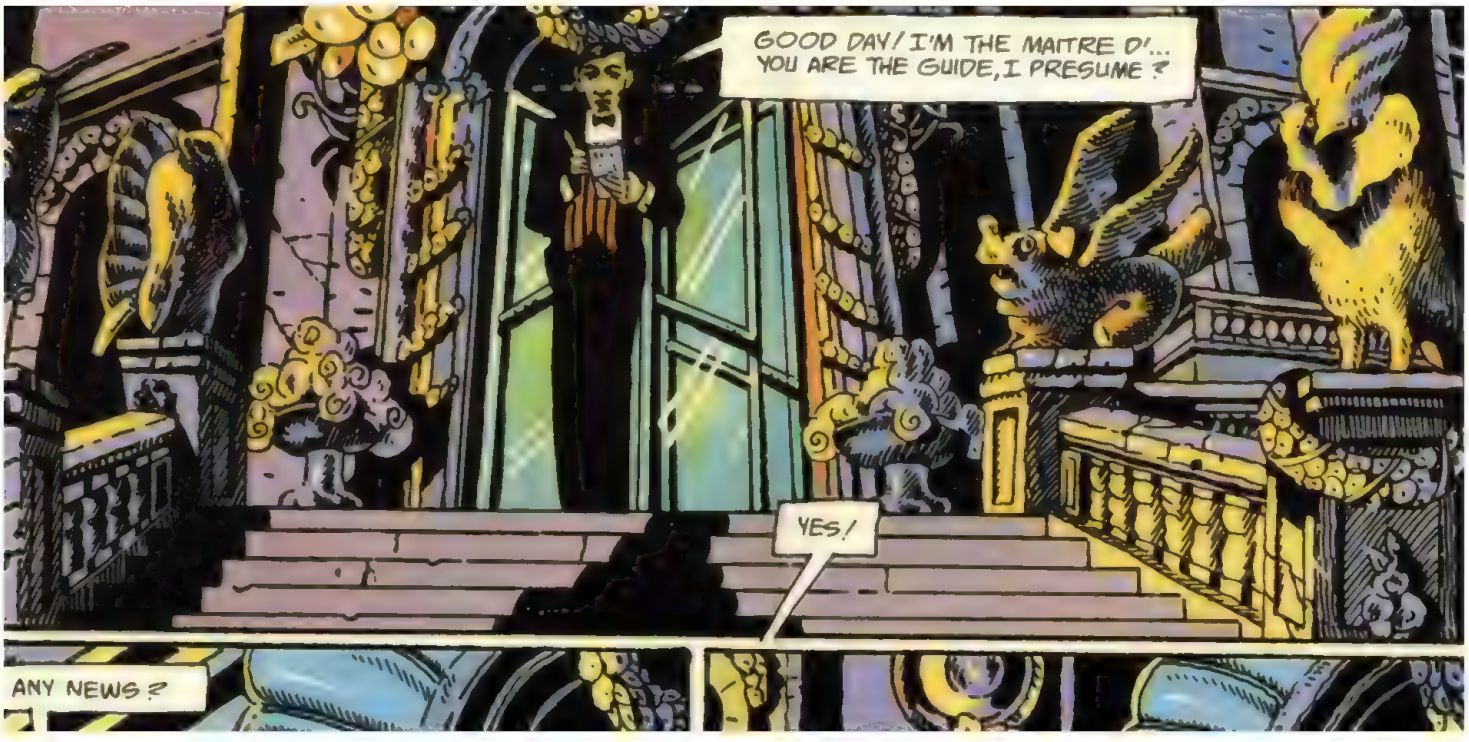
Because yes, there was all that in there as well. Sometimes even the greatest artist in the world needs to be told that they need to rein it all and perhaps, just perhaps, have someone else write the thing. This isn't to say that there were not incredible examples of storytelling going on in here. There were for sure, but so much of that was visual storytelling - so many of the greatest comics of the era were either wordless or verging on the wordless. There's also a definite uptick in storytelling as more and more writers got involved.

However, for all those problems with Métal Hurlant and with Heavy Metal, there's also the undeniable fact that they were representative of a major point in the history of comics. Suddenly, US readers could experience this veritable who's who of Euro comics talent, names that were already spoken in reverent tones, and names that would become legend in the future. They would also see some American artists, such as Richard Corben, who found their work fitting into the high, dark fantasy, the erotica, and the revolutionary science fiction visions that were showcased in Métal Hurlant and Heavy Metal, the sorts of adult works that were not afraid to show plenty of flesh but were also unafraid to go into the nature of existence, epic sagas, surrealism, dark and deadly fantasy, astonishing science-fiction, and everything imaginable in between. And yes, perhaps there's something to be said that some of the comics contained within are best read for the art (in fact Neil Gaiman has been quoted as saying that he preferred Moebius' Airtight Garage in the original French as he could imagine how brilliant it was.

Over time, there was a gradual inclusion of more US originated work that fitted in best with the majestic fantasy and sci-fi of the best Europe had to offer. So within a few years, we were seeing comics and features from Howard Cruse, Bernie Wrightson, Steve Bissette, Rick Veitch, John Totleben, Paul Kirchner, Matt Howarth, Gray Morrow, Jim Steranko, Arthur Suydam, Mark Wheatley, Trina Robbins, Gil Kane, Val Mayerik, Neal Adams, Peter Kuper, Todd Klein, John Workman, Gahan Wilson, Olivia De Berardinis and so many more. One easy way to think of the development of Heavy Metal is that things began a slow change from Euro only to a more diverse selection with the somewhat strange inclusion of Alien: The Illustrated Story by Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson in 1979, quite far from the original Métal Hurlant origins of Heavy Metal. But alongside this, there would also be the inclusion of the best of the Underground Comix and alternative comics scenes in the US, something that continued, accelerated even, under



HEAVY METAL 57


GOOD DAY! I'M THE MAITRE D'... YOU ARE THE GUIDE, I PRESUME?
YES!
ANY NEWS?

future editors, as would the development of features from a number of writers, all broadening the appeal of the magazine - underground comix legend Jay Kinney, William Burroughs, Stephen King, and sci-fi authors including Harlan Ellison, Robert Silverberg, and William Gibson - a particular fan of Heavy Metal himself.

*"Frequently the artwork I saw there [in Heavy Metal], particularly the stuff by those French guys, looked far more like the contents of my own head, when I tried to write, than anything I was seeing on the covers of SF paperbacks or magazines. ... So it's entirely fair to say, and I've said it before, that the way Neuromancer-the-novel "looks" was influenced in large part by some of the artwork I saw in 'Heavy Metal'. I assume that this must also be true of John Carpenter's 'Escape from New York', Ridley Scott's 'Blade Runner'", and all other artefacts of the style sometimes dubbed 'cyberpunk'. Those French guys, they got their end in early." WILLIAM GIBSON (Introduction for the Neuromancer graphic novel - 1989)*

Heavy Metal grew its readership and its scope over the years, running monthly until switching first to quarterly in 1986 and then to bi-monthly in 1989. HM Communications published 136 issues across its 15 years of ownership before selling to Kevin Eastman, co-creator of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in 1992. Eastman continued published the magazine under his Metal Mammoth, Inc. publishing name – a nod to his other publishing company, Tundra. Frankly, compared to the millions he would lose with Tundra and Tundra UK, his ownership of Heavy Metal was a stunning business move! Finally, to bring us up to date, Eastman sold almost all his stake in the title in 2014 and it continues publication under Heavy Metal Media, LLC., headed by TV producer Jeff Krelitz and co-founder of A&M records, David Boxenbaum.

*"Heavy Metal is what you graduate to when you are done playing with superheroes." JEFF KRELITZ - co-owner Heavy Metal, 2017*

Jeff Krelitz, speaking before the magazine's 40th anniversary in 2017 to the New York Times, described the magazine as taking "a hard left at a certain point." Too much attention was paid to the cover, he said, and those covers had "a kind of cheesecake, soft-core feel to it." This led to a re-think and changes to the magazine - "We are taking things back to basics and putting a current spin on it."

That was in 2017, and a big marketing move followed that included signing up Grant Morrison to be the new editor in chief - from issue 280 – whose tenure has seen something of a rejuvenation of the magazine and a move away from those "Mötley Crüe video" elements.

The impact of Heavy Metal on US comics is huge, it's effect on what was to come in the '80s with the adultification of US comics can't be overstated. Hell, even Marvel Comics eventually got in on the act with Epic Illustrated magazine (1980), as near a copy of Heavy Metal as they could do, albeit with less of the nudity that had so worried poor old Stan back when Marvel were approached by Les Humanoïdes Associés back in '77.

Yes, eventually we'd have had the chance to read Moebius' Airtight Garage and Arzach, Richard Corben's Den, Druillet's Lone Sloane, Conquering

> "It's like taking a vacation to an extra-terrestrial adult theme park that's bursting with energy, great forbidden fun, and sexy campiness — a place you definitely want to come back to again and again.

Armies by Jean-Pierre Dionnet and Jean-Claude Gal, The Long Tomorrow by Moebius and Dan O'Bannon (yes, THAT Dan O'Bannon, the man behind Alien, and also the man behind the 1981 Heavy Metal animated film), and so many other incredible examples of what comics could be. But Heavy Metal let us read them in English for the first time – that's the lasting legacy of Heavy Metal.

And it's a legacy that continues today. Métal Hurlant may have folded in 1987, resuming for a brief, unsuccessful resurgence from 2002- 2004, but Heavy Metal continues the mission it began with – showcasing the very best in comics art, the most avant-garde, the most incredible, the most impactful, from the greatest comic makers in the world.

**AUTHOR:**
RICHARD BRUTON

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# X MEN
# JOHN BYRNE

When **John Byrne's name first appeared as artist/penciller** in the credits for X-Men issue #108, the comic was a moderately successful thing, getting by on a bi-monthly schedule since the publication of Giant-Sized X-Men #1 in 1975.

When he left the title with #148 it was a spectacularly successful monthly. Chris Claremont's run on the series had already started when Byrne joined – but it was the combination of Claremont and John Byrne that would define the series, with classic moments including 'The Dark Phoenix Saga' and 'Days of Future Past'. Byrne and Claremont's X-Men would be the thing to propel the X-Men into the comic stratosphere, creating a run that would define the X-Men AND establish them as THE leading superheroes at Marvel for decades to come.

The X-Men were created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, as so many comics and character were at Marvel, back in 1963. But the comic hardly set the comics world on fire and was effectively cancelled in 1970 with issue #66, with the bi-monthly issues #67-93 (1970-1975) printing reprints of earlier X-Men tales.

And that may well have been the end of the X-Men without the addition of Len Wein, artist Dave Cockrum and the creation of the All-New X-Men in Giant-Size X-Men #1, published in February 1975. The new team brought together existing heroes Sunfire, Banshee, and Wolverine and new Wein/Cockrum creations Storm, Nightcrawler, Colossus, and Thunderbird and, with Cyclops & Professor X running things, became the All-New X-Men, beginning in X-Men issue #94.

Chris Claremont's name first appeared in the credits as court-writer on issues #94 and #95 before going solo in #96. It was to be the start of a phenomenal, 16-year writing run on X-Men for Claremont, the all-father of all things House of X.

That Claremont/Cockrum run was great, with all the elements we loved present in the Claremont X-Men; the drama and melodrama alongside the action, the wordiness of things, the epic scale of the events unfolding in the comic. We saw the return of Jean Grey/Marvel Girl, we read the 'Phoenix Saga' of issues #101-108, transforming Jean Grey into the Phoenix, and the addition of the space opera element to go alongside Claremont's soap opera style of writing with such elements as the Shi'ar, Lilandra, Imperial Guard, and the Starjammers.

But with that final issue of the Phoenix saga, we got the first art on the X-Men from John Byrne – and it's this moment that marks out the transition of X-Men from good to great, from middling seller to something that would become a best-seller and transform the Marvel Universe.

Before we go any further, mention to the other new name on the credits with X-Men issue #108, inker Terry Austin. In talking about the classic X-Men run we always hear that it's Claremont & Byrne's X-Men, but Terry Austin deserves just as much of the credit for how damn good he made Byrne's pencils look – with any penciller and inker team, it has to be the combination of the talents that gives us the great work.

Terry Austin really became known as the inker's inker and his wonderfully smooth, highly detailed style has been incredibly influential on a generation of inkers since. But, if there's a time when everything came good, where the synergy of penciller and inker was just so perfect, this Byrne and Austin pairing would be one of the contenders for best art team, certainly in the modern age of comics.

Born in the UK and emigrating to Canada as a child, Byrne's love of comics began with Batman and developed with the Kirby artwork and Stan Lee writing of Fantastic Four. Alongside Kirby, there was also a love of Neal Adams' naturalistic style and you could see that in Byrne's artwork - a mix of many artists, with Kirby and Adams top of the pile in terms of influence. His first published professional work came in 1974 with Skywald Publications' Nightmare #20 and with the backup strip, Rog-2000, in Charlton Comics' E-Man (1975). Byrne had been making his name in Marvel Comics with work on Iron Fist, first in Marvel Premiere#25 and then, alongside Claremont, in 15 issues of a new Iron Fist series that ran from 1975-1977.

His other pre-X-Men work at Marvel included The Champions and Marvel Team-Up, with issue #53 of that title being Byrne's first X-Men art, albeit just the team passing by to offer Spider-Man a

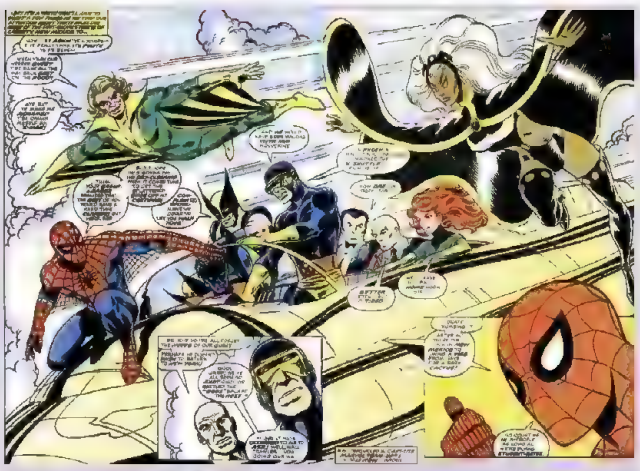
lift in the X-jet or whatever they were flying at the time.

For a perfect example of how Austin's inks complement Byrne's pencils, compare the artwork here of Byrne inked by Frank Giacoia (Marvel Team Up) and by Dan Adkins (Iron Fist) and finally by Austin – now that's how much an inker can affect the artwork!

But all of that work for Marvel was no indication of just how Byrne's run on the X-Men would be such a big deal, turning him into the superstar artist of the 80s and 90s and propelling the X-Men to comics highest levels and the sort of success never thought possible for this rag-tag group just a few years earlier.

From X-Men issue #108 to Byrne's final issue, Uncanny X-Men #143 in 1981 (the title change happened with issue #114), the trio of Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and Terry Austin produced 34 issues together (the only Byrne-less issue was #110, Austin skipped issue #118) and the X-Men went through issue after issue of excitement and adventure, classic comic after classic comic.

So much happened in the time Byrne and Claremont worked together, most often as co-plotters – with Byrne being credited as court-plotter from issue #114. There were new characters introduced, major story arcs, spectacular moments, all marshaled by both Claremont and Byrne, two creative talents pretty much at the peak of their work, working with the same synergy of writing and plotting as existed between Byrne and Austin for penciling and inking the comics.



The first time John Byrne drew the X-Men - Marvel Team-Up #53, page 14 by John Byrne & Frank Giacoia, 1977For a perfect example of how Austin's inks complement Byrne's pencils, compare the artwork here of Byrne inked by Frank Giacoia (Marvel Team Up) and by Dan Adkins (Iron Fist) and finally by Austin – now that's how much an inker can affect the artwork!

But although Claremont and Byrne's work together looked so seamlessly synergistic, the story behind the scenes was a little different. Both men had strong opinions on what they were doing and both were meant to have fought hard for their point of view, their particular plot element. Byrne has described the working relationship as akin to Gilbert and Sullivan and that he and Claremont were "almost constantly at war over who the characters were."

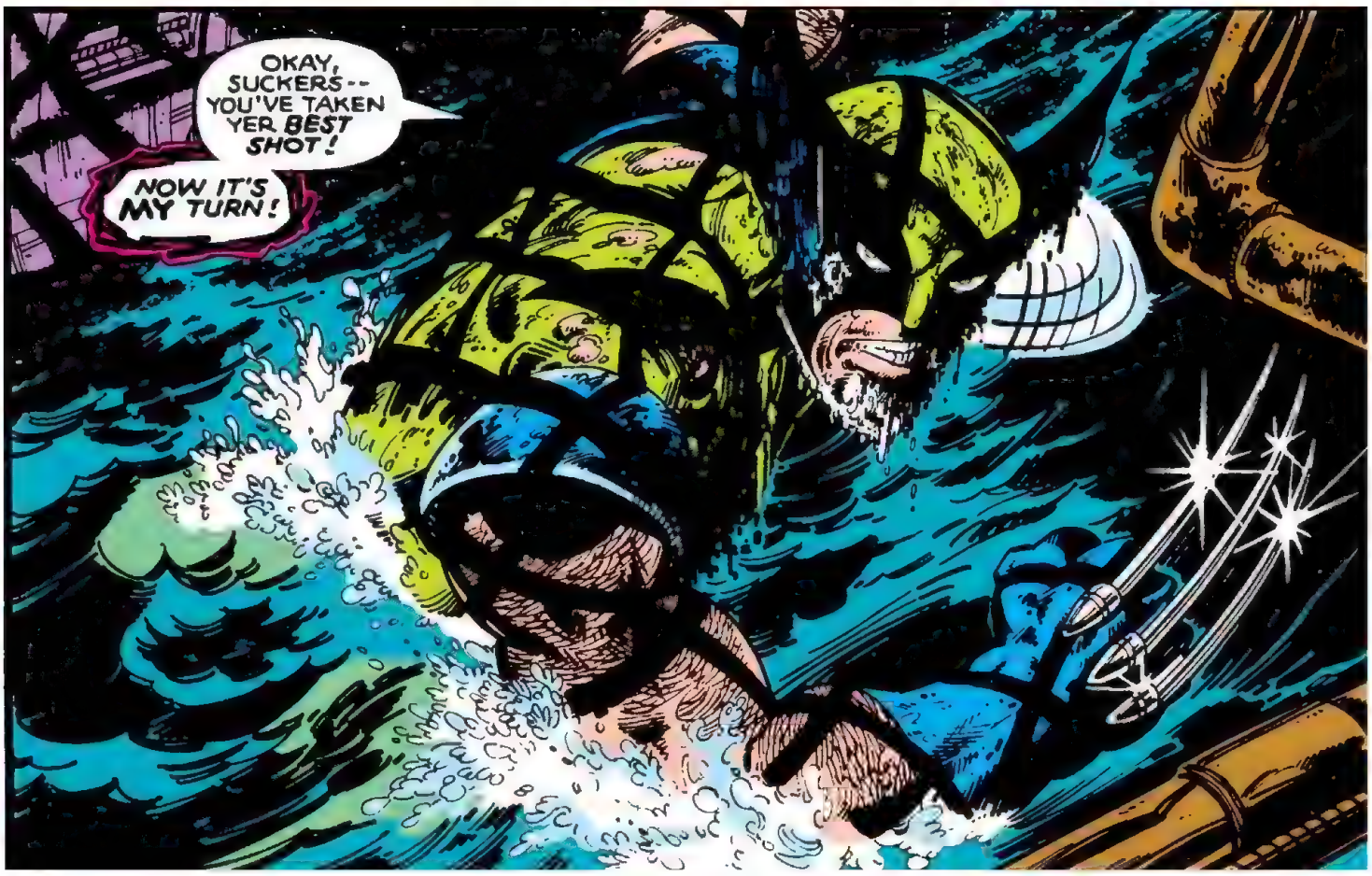
Just to give some idea of things, it all kicks off with the X-Men returning from their cosmic adventure – the first 'Phoenix Saga' where Jean Grey's live was transformed. Then there's a moment to relax before Wolverine's past comes back to haunt him in issue #109 and the attack of Weapon Alpha followed by the first appearance of Canada's Alpha Flight in issue #120. There's the return of Magneto, nastier and more deadly than ever, leading to Jean and Prof X believing the X-Men are all dead when they're actually stuck in the Savage Land and helping Ka-Zar save his kingdom from Sauron. Heading back home, there's diversions to Japan, where we get more hints of Wolverine's ever so mysterious and fascinating past and the X-Men save the country from Moses Magnum, and Calgary, with the aforementioned debut of the Claremont/Byrne created Alpha Flight. Back in the USA, there's little time for a little R&R before Arcade and Murderworld and a dash to reunite with Jean in Scotland, where Mutant X/Proteus threatens everyone and everything when reality goes wild in #126-128.

Meanwhile, still unaware that the team are alive, Jean Grey finds trouble in Scotland, with Jason Wyngarde/Mastermind beginning his mental visits to Jean/Phoenix, sowing seeds of confusion and dismay, even after she and Scott/Cyclops reunite.

Wyngarde's manipulation of her thoughts, the ways he dips in and out of her mind, it's wonderfully done, a slow and effective plot that's unfolded over many, many issues, until the reveal of the Hellfire Club as the arch manipulators behind things, with the White Queen and Black King running the plays.

The brilliance of the storylines here is down to the way Claremont and Byrne

THE FATE OF THE PHOENIX!
A MOMENT AGO, THEY HAD BEEN ON EARTH.
WHAT HAPPENED?!
WHERE THE DEVIL ARE WE?!
LET ME PUT IT THIS WAY, CYKE--
--I DON'T THINK WE'RE IN KANSAS ANYMORE
CUTE, BEAST. REAL CUTE. BUT WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?! WHAT DO THEY WANT WITH US?!
WE'RE SURROUNDED BY ARMED AND ARMORED WARRIORS, ANGEL, SO I DOUBT IT IS ANYTHING GOOD.
PROFESSOR XAVIER, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. WE WERE IN THE GARDEN OF JEAN'S PARENT'S HOUSE...
AND, NOW, WE ARE ON THE CARGO DECK OF A SHI'AR IMPERIAL DREADNOUGHT. I RECOGNIZE IT. THIS IS THE FLAGSHIP OF LILANDRA'S GRAND FLEET!
AND IF IT IS HERE, THEN LILANDRA-- THE WOMAN I LOVE-- CANNOT BE FAR...!
X-MEN! HEED THE WORDS OF GLADIATOR, PRAETOR OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD!
YOU STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF LILANDRA-- MAJESTRIX SHI'AR, EMPRESS!
YOUR FATE IS IN HER HANDS!
CHRIS CLAREMONT • JOHN BYRNE | TERRY AUSTIN | TOM ORZECHOWSKI, letterer GLYNIS WEIN, colorist | JIM SALICRUP & LOUISE JONES | JIM SHOOTER
WRITER-CO-PLOTTERS-PENCILER INKER EDITORS EDITOR-in CHIEF


OKAY, SUCKERS-- YOU'VE TAKEN YER BEST SHOT!
NOW IT'S MY TURN!

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THE UNCANNY
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SLAIN
SLAIN
SPRITE
BEAST
ICEMAN
SLAIN
ANGEL
SLAIN
WOLVERINE
SLAIN
ATTENTION!
YOU ARE NOW
LEAVING A

have built everything up and slowly unfolded things, with any number of small, overlapping elements all coming good. The number of storylines that the comic juggles, the number of relationships playing out, the combination of fine drama and melodrama and a goodly amount of action and adventure is still impressive as all hell, some 40+ years later.

That sense of Claremont and Byrne building up to things definitely takes hold through the first half of the 'Dark Phoenix Saga' in issues #129-134, with the introduction of Kitty Pryde, the continued manipulation of Jean Grey and her slow move to becoming Dark Phoenix, the Hellfire Clubs machinations, and that classic Wolverine in the sewers moment at the end of #133 and the 'Wolverine, Alone' story in issue #134 - all here, all Byrne, who reportedly pushed to have Wolverine play a bigger part in the book – and it shows, as over the Byrne run the character goes from bit player to superstar.

'The Dark Phoenix Saga' is to Claremont and Byrne what the 'Galactus Trilogy' is to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. It is a landmark in Marvel history, showcasing its creators' work at the height of their abilities."

**ROY THOMAS, PETER SANDERSON - FROM 'THE MARVEL VAULT' (2007), RUNNING PRESS**

Finally, there's issues #141 and #142, the famous 'Days of Future Past' 2-parter – the classic time-travel tale with Kitty Pryde's first X-Men adventure taken over by her future self, come back in time to save the world from a dystopian future where the heroes have all died. It's a fitting finale for Byrne's run, with the fun coda of Kitty's Xmas adventure, 'Demon', in issue #143.

> "With Byrne's exit, Claremont's X-Men continued, building on all that the Claremont/Byrne/Austin team had built, becoming the biggest, boldest, most popular title Marvel published

So much of this Claremont and Byrne run is remembered for the big events, the big stories, but when you go back and re-read them – and you should – you're going to be surprised at just how well Claremont (with Byrne co-plotting) managed to squeeze a lot of melodrama and drama into things. For example, the two-part Alpha Flight story in #120/121 spends an awful lot of time, pretty much all of #120 certainly, with the X-Men out of costume, going under the radar to avoid detection. And then there's the Dark Phoenix Saga, technically beginning in issue #129 but the seeds of what's going on are there for so many issues before, all giving the book a sense of having a huge, unfolding, ongoing story to tell.

With Byrne's exit, Claremont's X-Men continued, building on all that the Claremont/Byrne/Austin team had built, becoming the biggest, boldest, most popular title Marvel published, with the X-Men line exploding into multiple titles over the years. But that success all came about because of the New X-Men and the work of Len Wein and Dave Cockrum, but most especially the writing of Chris Claremont, the inking of Terry Austin and the stunning plotting and art of the legendary John Byrne, all beginning here in 1977.

Byrne's superstardom carried on past his leaving the X-Men. Short runs on The Avengers and Captain America during his X-Men run were followed, post X-Men, by his five-year stint writing and drawing Fantastic Four (1981-1986) in what is regarded by so many as the other essential Byrne series and the best of the non-Stan Lee & Jack Kirby FF.

And through the next 20 years after leaving the X-Men, Byrne's work at Marvel, with the massive Superman reboot done at DC Comics between 1986-1988, with the creator-owned work at Dark Horse in the early '90s, John Byrne was a name associated with so many different characters. But nothing, absolutely nothing, not for me anyway, beats the sheer incredible work he brought to the pages of the X-Men and Uncanny X-Men with Chris Claremont and Terry Austin from 1977 to 1981.

**AUTHOR:**
RICHARD BRUTON

THE GREATEST SPACE FANTASY FILM OF ALL!
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MARVEL COMICS GROUP
No.1
FEB 8, 1978
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ENTER: LUKE SKYWALKER! WILL HE SAVE THE GALAXY OR DESTROY IT?
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A CUT-OUT STAR WARS X-FIGHTER!
ENEMY FIGHTER NEXT WEEK!
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# STAR WARS WEEKLY

## The greatest space fantasy of all

1978 saw Marvel Comics in a bad way. The publishing house had flirted with bankruptcy during the mid 70's, teetering on the edge of extinction until a little fancied licenced property became the first comic book since Dell's Uncle Scrooge in 1960 to top a million copies sold. That comic was issue one of Star Wars, and by 1978 the sci-fi classic which had quite literally changed the face of Hollywood, licensing, merchandising, marketing and the way summer blockbusters are handled.

The film didn't arrive in UK cinemas until December 27th 1977, but the title reached the shores in the UK in the form of a weekly comic on Wednesday February 8th 1978. Costing 10 pence, the first issue kicked off with the Howard Chaykin drawn and Roy Thomas written adaptation of the film. Written and drawn without much more than a handful of studio images and early versions of the films many locations, vehicles and creatures, the title is fondly regarded by readers of the day and looked on in bemusement by most folks born after the days of the original trilogy.

Despite the hurdles laid out in front of it, the title swiftly became the biggest selling weekly comic in the UK,

> "The only interest they got was from IPC **because Star Wars Weekly was outselling 2000AD** and they only wanted Star Wars Weekly

outselling even the smash hit 2000AD which itself launched in 1977, the year of the Daily Star, Pot Noodles and Summer Nights. "Enter: Luke Skywalker! Will he save the galaxy or destroy it?" screamed the cover, promising us "A Valuable First Issue". Prophetic words, as the value of that first issue would arguably lead to the salvation of Marvel UK and the entire company.

I interviewed editor Dez Skinn a few years ago, and he brought up the dire state of Marvel UK at the time.

"Marvel UK was haemorrhaging money. The only thing that was making any money was Star Wars Weekly. It was doing so badly they tried to sell the company off. Nobody wanted it, nobody found it viable. The only interest they got was from IPC because Star Wars Weekly was outselling 2000AD and they only wanted Star Wars Weekly. They didn't want Spider-Man and the Hulk and The Avengers, they didn't want any of that. So that didn't work for Marvel because they were already licensing Star Wars from

Lucasfilm so they wouldn't get much out of a shared sub-licence."

While a large portion of the content was shared, the UK version was significantly different from its US counterpart. It was far larger, in the classic UK comic format, had black and white pages and held fewer pages of the monthly Star Wars title, meaning one issue of US content could be spread across multiple UK weekly issues. As is the style of British weekly comics it ran a back-up strips across its run including Tales of the Watcher, Star Lord, Adam Warlock, The Micronauts, Guardians of the Galaxy and Deathlok.

The UK title also gave away free gifts, starting with the infamous X-Fighter in issue 1 and over the years bringing us free posters, transfer sets, mini model sets and more besides. Editor Dez Skinn was keen to maximise the freedom of having the Star Wars licence, and making it stand out on busy newsagents shelves.

"I looked at Star Wars Weekly and it was up to about issue 40. So the first thing I did was put photographs on the cover. I mean, how obvious is that? Let's have Luke and Leia and Darth and the Millennium Falcon, let's have them on the cover. Not drawings of them, you've got the licence! We can do the photo's! It's not rocket science."

From issue one in February '78 right through to issue 117 on 21st May 1980 the title brought the galaxy to kids across the UK and beyond every Wednesday. Reprinting the issues from their American counterparts, the 13th issue saw the story of Star Wars continued in New Planets, New Perils as the infamous green rabbit Jaxxon was introduced to the galaxy in the year we bore witness to the one and only television screening of The Star Wars Holiday Special. An admittedly rocky ride, the quality of those early pre-expanded universe stories developed, the artwork along with it as the designs and vibe of the original film were left behind and the gap to The Empire Strikes Back bridged.

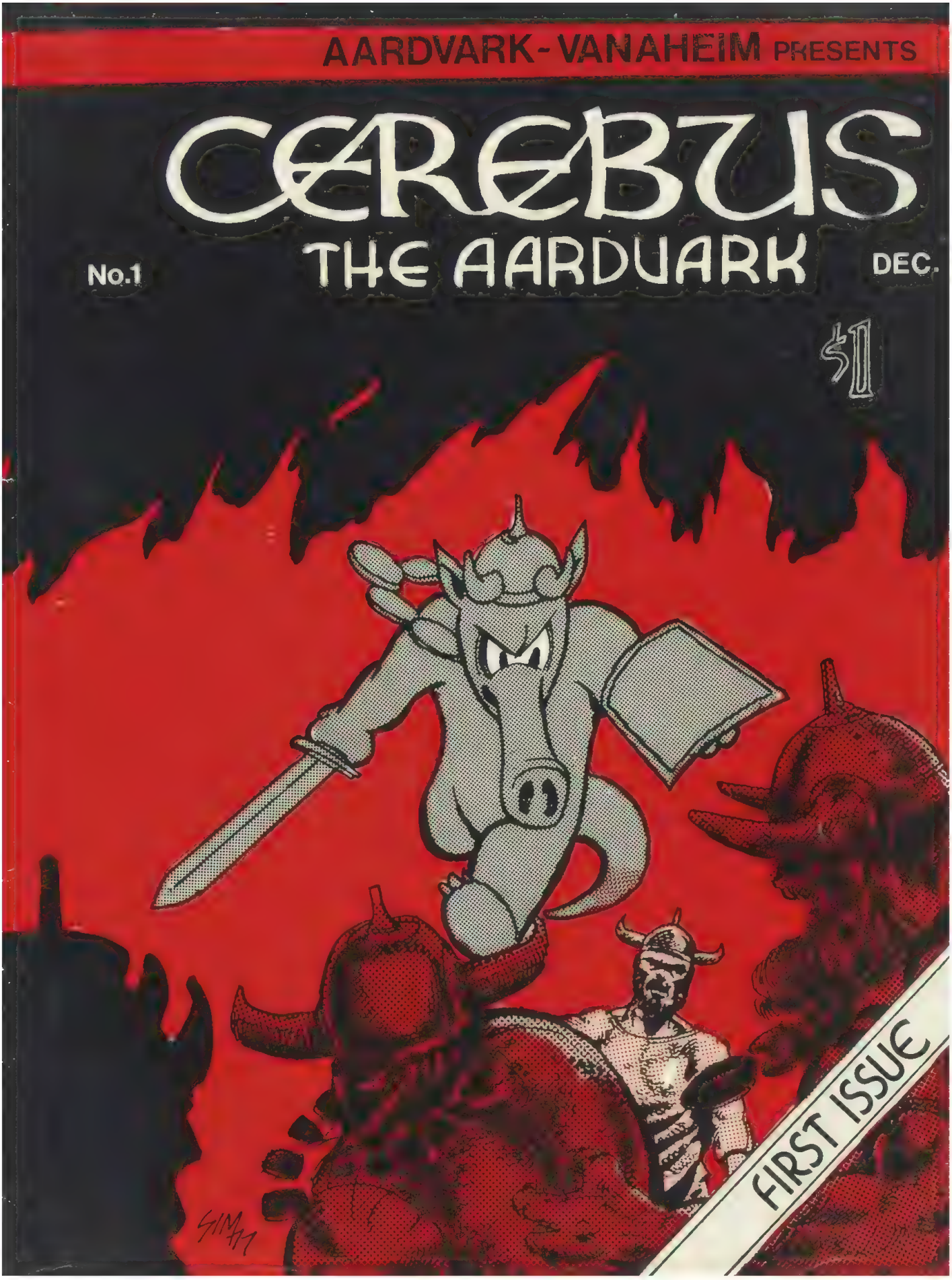
> "The nuclear **impact of Star Wars simply can't be underestimated.** On TV it directly led to the greenlighting of such series as Battlestar Galactica and Mork and Mindy.

The nuclear impact of Star Wars simply can't be underestimated. On TV it directly led to the greenlighting of such series as Battlestar Galactica and Mork and Mindy. Its wider influence saw the return of Star Trek on the big screen and prompted Disney to take a journey into The Black Hole, along with a procession of mixed budget films like Battle Beyond the Stars, Starcrash and Humanoid. The comics realm saw a similar influence as the Micronauts launched at Marvel and comic versions of Star Trek returned to Marvel along with Battlestar Galactica. Star Wars kicked off other franchises purely on its star power alone, and the potential of similar success.

Issue 118 saw the title switch names to The Empire Strikes Back weekly to mark the arrival of the sequel film, and over the years switches to monthly titles and by the time of Return of the Jedi a hop back to weekly releases, but to fans of a certain age and savvy modern collectors interested in products of the time Star Wars Weekly simply reeks of pure, uncluttered mainline Star Wars.

**AUTHOR:**
MARK NEWBOLD

THE GREATEST SPACE FANTASY FILM OF ALL!
STAR WARS
WEEKLY
10P
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
No.2
FEB 15, 1978
Every Wednesday
TM and © 1978 MARVEL COMICS INTERNATIONAL LTD
WHEN THE SAND CREATURES STRIKE!
FREE !!!
INSIDE:
CUT-OUT
T.I.E. FIGHTER!


AARDVARK-VANAHEIM PRESENTS
CEREBUS
No.1
THE AARDVARK
DEC.
$1
SIM
FIRST ISSUE

# CEREBUS
# THE EARLY YEARS

"Cerebus, as if I need to say so, is still to comics **what Hydrogen is to the periodic table**" *Alan Moore*

When talking about comics in 1977, you simply cannot ignore the debut of Cerebus, the 300-issue, 6,000-page epic series created, written, drawn, lettered, and published by Dave Sim from 1977-2004 (with artist Gerhard contributing the incredible backgrounds for the series from issue 65 onwards).

Cerebus the character is an anthropomorphic aardvark whose roles in the series go from barbarian adventurer/mercenary, to politician, prime minister, and Pope, before becoming an ever-less important feature in his own tale, taking a back seat at many times, especially as the series moved past issue 200.

Cerebus the comic is so many things – pure tenacity of belief in your own artistic ability, a stunning example of experimentation in form and content, an example of an incredibly flawed work of art, and a particular example of watching a unique and important artist push himself from amateurish parody/homage to master of his craft AND the difficult and complex issue of whether we should allow the views of an artist colour our reading our their works.

## EVERY SAGA HAS TO START SOMEWHERE

We're not going to be talking about the complete Cerebus here, as there's plenty to talk about in years/volumes to come of the position of Cerebus as one of the most important comic series of the modern age in many ways.

Here, we're dealing with the very first book – 'Cerebus', containing issues 1-25 of the Cerebus comic - because even a 300-issue, 6,000 page plus saga needs a beginning and with Cerebus that beginning came in December 1977 with issue one.

It all starts off as a pretty amateurish parody of the Sword and Sorcery genre in general and of Marvel Comics' Conan in particular, with Sim attempting to ape Barry Windsor-Smith's beautiful and lavish Conan art. But these first stories, for all their simplicity, all their faults, show us plenty of the comic's potential and serve as a perfect example of Sim's growing talent and ambition.

The setup for the first year of the comic is simple – Cerebus the mercenary/ adventurer/ barbarian aardvark exists in a world of humans, he's greedy, selfish, nasty, quick-tempered, violent, and his simple life revolves around getting money, drinking said money, and then going off adventuring once more to get more money. And although he doesn't know it yet, while he's doing this his life is the happiest and most successful it's ever going to be.

In those first 10 or so issues, Sim is leaning hard into Conan, into Barry Windsor-Smith's artistic style (granted, not all that well, but there's still hints of things to come). However, from the outset we see that Sim's got a fine command of both verbal and visual comedy and a talent for parody, something that would continue, to a greater or lesser extent, for the length of the series.

Just look at the scenes between Cerebus and Red Sophia, in issue three, for an obvious early example. Sim's obvious parody of Robert E. Howard's Red Sonja, particularly the Marvel Comics version with that ridiculously impractical scale-mail bikini armour is funny, with Sim taking the idea and playing it up for all its worth. But, given that Red Sophia appears again in issue 10, it gives us a perfect chance to compare the artistic improvements you could see in Sim's work even this early on.

LOOKS LIKE YOU HAVE EVERYTHING! THERE'S ONE MORE THING I FORGOT TO MENTION...
...MY DAUGHTER RED SOPHIA! SHE MUST SEE THE MAN DIE SLOWLY— YOU SEE HE HAS BE-SMIRCHED HER HONOUR AND MUST SUFFER THE PENALTY...
YOU WILL DOUBTLESS APPRECIATE MY COMPANY, SHORT GREY ONE!
HMM! SPLIT TWO WAYS THAT'S ENOUGH FOR A FEW MONTHS' OF COMFORTABLE LIVING...
THREE WAYS, DARLING
ENOUGH TALK, YOU SHORT GREY CELIBATE!
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF...
THESE?!

(Left – Cerebus issue 3 (April-May 1978). Right – Cerebus issue 10 ( June-July 1979). One year and seven issues difference and a great example of Dave Sim's artistic improvement in such a short time – but of course, there was better to come!)

After that appearance of Red Sophia, things move pretty fast with a number of character introductions that will feature heavily through the series. So although reading these first Cerebus issues might not be the perfect place to start to discover what makes Cerebus so great (I'd recommend either the High Society or Jaka's Story collections as a first read), they're still important in that they set up many of the bigger themes and the subtext of much that comes later.

The love of Cerebus's life, Jaka, is introduced in issue six and we get a terrible foreshadowing of how their entire years-long relationship will eventually play out, with a drugged Cerebus falling quickly in love and then, once the drugs wear off, unceremoniously dumps her, leaving her broken-hearted – and this on-off love story, with Cerebus always managing to destroy his best chance of happiness, is what forms the emotional heart of the series.

And with the introduction of first Sophia, then Elrod, the Roach, and Lord Julius, the magnificent Groucho Marx character, we get that the wonderful ability Sim has to mimic, to pastiche, to parody. Sure, the examples early on are raw, but they swiftly develop into hilarity and superbly polished caricatures.

"Mind your manners, son! I've got a tall pointy hat! Status, boy! You can argue with me, but you can't argue with status!" *Elrod.*

Elrod's bluster, all Foghorn Leghorn vocals is the first evidence of something that Sim would master, that mimicry of vocal stylings and dialects. And with the appearance of the Roach, Sim has a perfectly formed clothes-horse to drape all many of superhero and comic industry parodies over. The Roach will feature, in many different forms, throughout the series – and always on the wrong side of sanity. With his introduction in issue 11, 'The Merchant & The Cockroach', he's the rich merchant dressing up at night to exact revenge on the criminals who killed his parents – Sim doing a completely insane Batman, wringing every drop of comedic value from a deliberately ridiculous character.

And then there's issue 14, 'The Walls of Palnu,' bringing the absolute brilliance of Sim's comedic ability fully out with the introduction of Lord Julius - Groucho Marx as political leader, fully formed with the walk, the cigar, the painted on moustache and bewildering and confusing everyone with a deliberately chaotic bureaucratic mess of governance that's a joy to read. Every time Lord Julius comes into Cerebus, every single time, it's just an incredible example of how to deliver the laughs. These three issues set in Palnu give us the first extended Cerebus storyline and its ambition is obvious – with all that political satire just building things up for what would become book two, High Society.

***"I'll come straight to the point. As a reward for saving my life, I'd like you to be in charge of my security forces. Your official title will be 'Kitchen staff supervisor'."***

***"Why not 'Director of Security Services?"***

***"Impossible - that's the title I gave to the Secretary of the Navy."***

***"But, if he's the Secretary of the Navy, why did you give him...?"***

***"When you're running a bureaucracy, the best way to safeguard your job is to make sure you're the only one who knows how the whole thing works."***

***"So what does the Secretary of the Navy do?"***

***"He meets twice a week with the cook to plan military strategy."*** *LORD JULIUS & CEREBUS*

Finally, in picking out important moments from this first 'book' of Cerebus, we have issue 20, the first of the 'Mind Games' episodes, a chance for Sim to explore Cerebus' head and introduce some of the more metaphysical elements of the series that would become increasingly important as things went on. A drugged Cerebus having a 20-page conversation with both the mysterious Suenteus Po, leader of the Illusionists, sworn enemies of the Cirinists, and a mind traveller to boot, and the Cirinist warriors who've kidnapped him. The issue itself is everything that's great about Cerebus in terms of the writing and setups, with Sim having Cerebus play the two sides off against the other, the cunning of the aardvark so obvious, and managing to make it all funny to boot. But it was the way in which Sim constructed the issue that was an early indication of just how experimental Sim was getting already – every page of the comic, when put together, forms a single spectacular image of a giant Cerebus – something Alan Moore did with Promethea some 25 years later. Yep, that's Sim's ambition/madness/vision writ large right there, two and a half years into the series.

MAKE WAY FOR--
ELROD
THE ALBINO!
WHY, HELLO THERE SHORT, GREY AND FUZZY-- YOU HAVE A THING FOR CRUSHED VELVET?
SPEAK WHEN YOU'RE SPOKEN TO, SON-- YOU'RE MAKING A BAD FIRST IMPRESSION!
AND STAND UP! YOU'LL NEVER LEAVE YOUR MARK ON THE WORLD HIDING BEHIND BOLTS OF CLOTH ALL DAY...
SOONER OR LATER YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE OFF THE BUNNY SUIT, KID-- THEN, I SAY THEN WHERE WILL YOU BE?
OH--I GET IT-- YOU'RE OVER-COME BY MY PRESENCE-- AWED BY THE SIGHT OF A TRUE KING! BY THE REALITY OF THE RULER OF MELVIN-BONE--LAST LORD OF A DYING RACE--A WANDERER THAT IS....
YOU GETTING ALL THIS DOWN BOY? OR AM I GOING TOO FAST FOR YA?

MEANWHILE...
ehm.
YOU WISH SOMETHING, SHORT GREY ONE?
uhn... uh uh--uh uhhnn...
YOU WILL HAVE TO SPEAK LOUDER --JAKA CANNOT HEAR YOU
IF YOU WISHED, CEREBUS WOULD KILL YOU A YAK FOR YOUR SUPPER
JAKA THINKS YOU ARE CUTE!...
SMAK!

In those 25 issues you see the incredible developmental path that Sim was on, a truly remarkable evolution of an artist. Yet frankly, that was absolutely nothing. Just a simple comparison of what's here in the first book and where Sim got to by issue 50, by issue 100 – that's simply incredible. Certainly within a decade or so, Sim went from talented amateur writer/artist to one of the finest artists in so many aspects of comics, a visionary creator, and yes, he's one of those few comic artists you could quite rightly describe as a comics genius. Sadly, he's also a flawed genius, a genius whose views would offend, anger, and disturb many people as the series went on.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF CEREBUS - FROM SIMPLE PARODY TO EPIC SAGA

Early on, Sim had been creating Cerebus issue to issue, with his storylines running single issues or two, three issues at most. However, Sim was soon realizing he was rather in a creative dead-end – just how many more issues of basic Conan parody could he manage?

***"I was scraping the bottom of the barrel of the handful of sword-and-sorcery clichés... Once I moved from a field in which I had no interest to fields in which I was interested (politics, economics, power, religion, etc.), I began to find my voice"*** *DAVE SIM.*

The move from Conan parody to Sim writing about what interested him changed the entire nature of Cerebus. Instead of going issue to issue, Sim would instead tell the complete life story of his character, from his position now until his death in the final issue. That was going to allow him to write about everything he was interested in. It was also going to take 300 issues and another 25 or so years.

The change in the comics took a little while to happen. The change in Dave's head was a lot more sudden and, as with artistic visionaries through the ages, was accomplished through the use of mind altering drugs and a nervous breakdown that would lead to Sim ending up in a psych ward. Checking himself out, Sim had a revelation that put him on a path of artistic inspiration that would see him working on his personal saga until 2004.

With the visionary idea of 300 issues in place, Sim picked up the pace and transformed his. As part of the vision, the shorter adventures of, at most, three issues length gave way to a bigger, more expansive storyline, one that would go places no-one, except Sim, would ever imagine.

## TALENTED, VISIONARY, TROUBLING - SEPERATING THE ART FROM THE ARTIST

One thing that simply cannot be avoided in talking about Cerebus, even in something like this where we're concentrating on the early years, is that Cerebus might well be a work of genius but it's a work of a decidedly flawed genius.

Sim's talent is undeniable. Certainly, by the time Gerhard came on board, Sim's character work was already superb - but having Gerhard there to take the weight of the backgrounds freed Sim up to reach new heights. And let's not forget the thing that I would say Dave Sim is the best in the business at - creative lettering and lettering as storytelling itself. Sim's lettering became a visible and integral storytelling element.

But just as it's undeniable that Sim became an incredible talent, it's similarly undeniable that he's a very difficult and complex talent utilizing his incredible skills to put forth what could be charitably described as the ravings of a self-deluding isolationist with questionable views on everything from women to religion is a terrible thing.

He put forward the idea in issue 186 that women were voids, "without a glimmer of understanding of intellectual processes," and that these voids effectively sucked the male creative light dry. Sim later described his views as "anti-feminism". Others simply called it by a more familiar name - straight up misogyny. Things didn't get any better with another outburst in issue 265 decrying the supposed "feminist / homosexualist axis" that opposed traditional and rational societal values. Sim's views on women and his adoption of a peculiar mix of religious ideas grabbed from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, meant that the last 100 issues were difficult, slow, and reactionary.

But, even with all that, one thing that cannot be denied is that there's never been anything like Cerebus in the history of comics. Nor, I'd warrant, will there ever be in future. And it all started with that simple image of an aardvark riding into adventure here in 1977.

**AUTHOR:**
RICHARD BRUTON

# 1977 - COMIC REVIEWS

2000 AD
8p
TOP THRILL
JUDGE DREDD
THE COMIC OF TOMORROW —TODAY!
DREDD'S ATTACKING THE CYBORGS! BUT HE'LL GO OVER THE EDGE AND WE'RE TWO MILES UP!

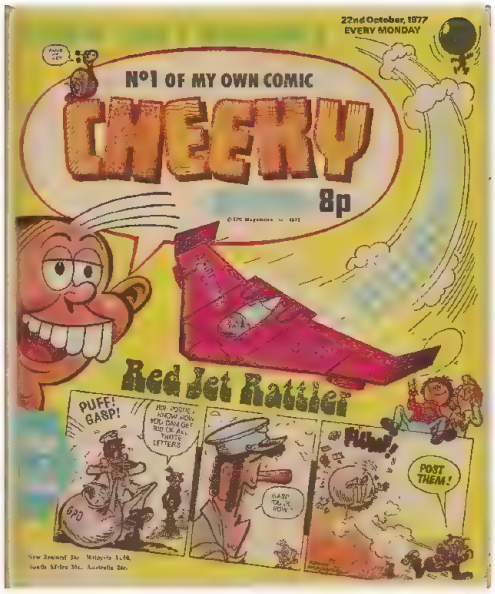
## 2000 AD

Anthology
Edited/Created by Pat Mills
Publisher - IPC Magazines

Since 1977, 2000 AD has bragged of being the Galaxy's Greatest Comic and with a history of incredible creations, amazing stories, and stunning artwork, who could argue?

The first year was all about Pat Mills – he developed the series (working with John Wagner to develop characters), edited the comic, and extensively re-wrote much of the material. In that first thrill-powered, Zarjaz year, 2000 AD included Dan Dare, Invasion (Bill Savage), the dino-action of Flesh, MACH-1, Harlem's Heroes, Shako, and Future Shocks. And the names behind the strips included Gerry Finley-Day, Tom Tully, Steve Moore, Alan Hebden, Dave Gibbons, Massimo Belardinelli, Jesus Blasco, Ian Kennedy, Mike Dorey, Brian Bolland, Ramon Sola, and Ian Gibson.

2000 AD's most famous strip, Judge Dredd, didn't appear until Prog 2. Although created by Mills, Wagner, and Carlos Ezquerra, that first appearance was written by Peter Harris, extensively re-written by Mills, and had art from newcomer Mick McMahon. John Wagner returned to the strip to pen The Robot Wars, Dredd's first big tale, making Dredd the most popular strip in 2000 AD, a position the Lawman of the future has rarely lost since.

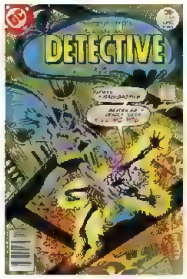



## Cheeky Weekly

Anthology
Publisher - IPC Magazines

Cheeky was yet another new comic for UK kids spun out of a strip from another comic – it was a popular thing in 1977, with Plug the comic doing just the same, bringing the character from Bash Street Kids into his own comic in the same year.

Plug lasted 77 issues, from September '77 to February '79 (merging into the Beezer), whilst Cheeky, the toothy kid from the Krazy Gang in Krazy comic managed 117 issues from October '77 to February '80 before merging into Whoopee!. It was a classic bit of '70s UK kids comics filled with the staples of the time, slapstick (Skateboard Squad), puns (6 Million Dollar Gran), and humour strips drawn by the likes of Frank McDiarmid, Mike Lacey, Ian Knox, Nigel Edwards, and Robert Nixon.



## Detective Comics #469-476 – The Dark Detective

Written by Steve Englehart, art by Walt Simonson, Marshall Rogers, inks by Al Milgrom, Terry Austin.
Publisher - DC Comics

Beginning in 1977, these eight issues of absolute Batman brilliance by writer Steve Englehart and artists Walt Simonson and Marshall Rogers effectively gave us the Batman we have today. No-one's ever really settled on a name for the run, but we'll go with Englehart's Dark Detective I title (Englehart and Rogers returned for Dark Detective II in 2005).

What made this work so well is that Englehart took Batman, still trying to shake off the (brilliantly) camp pop-art of the late '60s Batman TV series and returned things to their pulp noir roots. If you're looking for the moment where Batman became the modern Batman that we've seen in movies ever since, don't look to Miller and Jansen's Dark Knight Returns, look to Englehart, Simonson, and Marshall's Dark Detective. This was the series that gave us modern-day Batman and a Gotham City that will never be out of the shadows.

BATTLE
VALIANT
HE WAS BORN A SLAVE IN ALABAMA...HE BECAME A BANDIT IN MEXICO.
HE RETURNED TO BECOME THE SCOURGE OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR!
EL MESTIZO

## El Mestizo

By Alan Hebden and Carlos Ezquerra
First appearance – Battle #118,
16 episodes in total
Publisher – IPC (UK)

El Mestizo was completely different from everything else in the brilliant '70s & '80s war comic Battle – a classic outside tale but set in the American Civil War. It only had 16 episodes, but they were so damn good that they ranked amongst Ezquerra's personal favourites of any of his creations.

With El Mestizo we had a lead character straight out of a Spaghetti Western, all about riding into the latest conflict, on the side of what's right, whether that's Yankee or Confederate, a modern retelling of the old Western hero, brilliantly illustrated by Ezquerra at the height of his powers. Sometimes a classic runs for years, slowly building to greatness, but El Mestizo came out guns blazing, 16 weeks and done, but left its own mark on comics history.

## Fury

Anthology
Publisher - Marvel UK (UK)

The '70s are full of comics springing forth to jump onto this or that bandwagon, and Fury is the perfect example of this, a weekly published by Marvel UK from March to August 1977, managing just 25 issues in all, it featured some great looking covers from Dave Gibbons and Carlos Ezquerra. But inside UK readers found reprints of 1960s American Marvel material of Sgt. Fury and Captain Savage and his Leatherneck Raiders.

It was an obvious attempt to jump onboard the vogue for war comics and the popularity of Warlord, Victor and especially Battle Picture Weekly. But, given that those titles were producing all-new material in a new gritty and more realistic style, UK readers didn't warm to these re-heated '60s tales, which is why the title lasted a mere six months before being merged with Mighty World of Marvel.

## What If?

Various writers and artists
Publisher - Marvel Comics (USA)

What If? – a series where absolutely everything you needed to know was there in the title. And although the idea of doing alternate timeline tales was hardly new for comics, the idea of delivering an ongoing series asking the question of an entire superhero line was another thing.

Sure, sometimes the ideas and stories were a little poor, sometimes they were really pretty good. But that's almost beside the point. Because the real fun of What If? was the idea of the thing, the speculating on what might happen. And it's an idea that a lot of fans enjoy as well, contributing to the astonishing 13 series since this first (and best) series appeared.

> Inside Heavy Metal you could find a heady mix of fantasy, erotica, and science fiction unrestrained by the shackles of the Comics Code Authority

## Heavy Metal

Anthology
Issue 1 cover by Nicollet. First issue includes: Den by Richard Corben; Rut by Druillet; Conquering Armies by Dionnet and Gal; Adventures of Yriss by Druillet and Alexis; Azrach by Moebius; The Sword of Shannara by Terry Brooks; Space Punks by Mezieres; Sunspot by Vaughn Bodé.
Publisher – HMRC Communications (USA)

Heavy Metal, "The adult illustrated fantasy magazine," took on the mantle of the classic European adult fantasy comic magazine Métal Hurlant and ran with it, giving us exceptional European and North American comic art for decades since its beginning in 1977.

It began by reprinting and translating Métal Hurlant material, bringing the work of Enki Bilal, Milo Manara, Jean Giraud (Moebius), Guido Crepax, Liberatore, and Philippe Druillet to American eyes. But there was also space for work in the early issues from Americans Richard Corben and Vaughn Bode, already published in Métal Hurlant, before the magazine began including new material from the greats of US comics and comix, including Arthur Suydam, Bernie Wrightson, Olivia, and so many more.

Inside Heavy Metal you could find a heady mix of fantasy, erotica, and science fiction, unrestrained by the shackles of the Comics Code Authority. It's continued that tradition ever since, surviving various ups and downs, changes of ownership and publisher, but the impact of the magazine back in 1977 is something that cannot be understated.

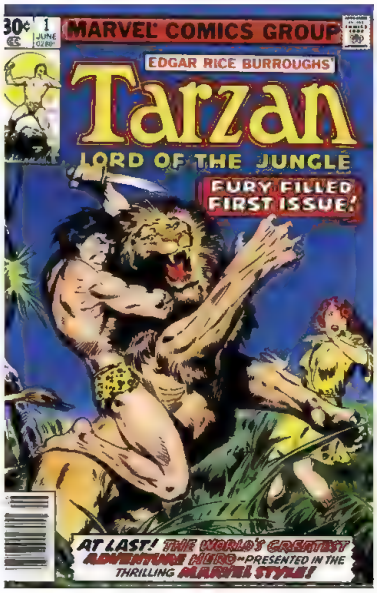
## Thorgal

By Jean Van Hamme and
Grzegorz Rosinski
Serialised in Tintin Magazine,
collected and published in album
format by Lombard (Belgium)

Classic epic fantasy tale combining medieval sword and sorcery, ancient mythology, and science fiction, in a series that delights in crossing genres. It's a series where Gods, monsters, magic, and sci-fi all fill the pages, but far more importantly, so do the everyday lives, loves and conflicts of Thorgal and his clan.

Thorgal is pretty near the finest example of the sword and sorcery fantasy comic genre, created by the Belgian writer Jean Van Hamme and the Polish graphic artist Grzegorz Rosinski. Van Hamme departed after volume 26 (2006), with Rosinski leaving after volume 36 (2018) but the series has continued with new writers and artists creating both the main series and three spin-off series, Kriss of Valnor, Louve, and The Youth of Thorgal.

With 40+ years of stories, 59 albums, and 11 million plus books in print, Thorgal really is a Euro comics sensation that defines sword and sorcery.

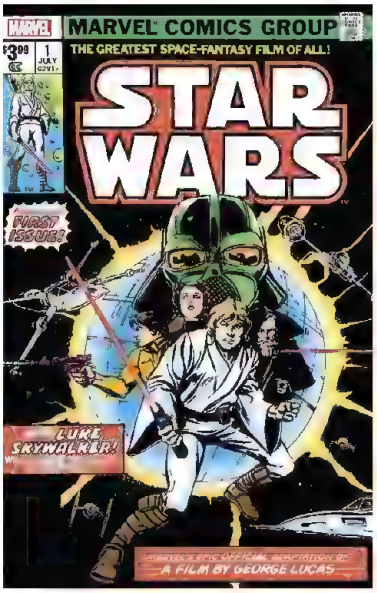

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS'
Tarzan
LORD OF THE JUNGLE
FURY FILLED FIRST ISSUE!
AT LAST! THE WORLD'S GREATEST ADVENTURE HERO PRESENTED IN THE THRILLING MARVEL STYLE!

## Tarzan

DC series adaptation, art by Joe Kubert
Marvel series adaptation and written by
Roy Thomas, art by John Buscema
Publisher – DC Comics (USA) and Marvel
Comics (USA)

There had already been a long history of Edgar Rice Burroughs' most famous creation in comics, including the comic strip featuring art from (amongst many others) Hal Foster, Burne Hogarth, and Russ Manning. But 1977 saw two comic adaptations in one year – one ending, one beginning.

DC Comics had published Tarzan from 1972-1977, adapted and drawn by Joe Kubert, producing perhaps his career defining work. But despite Kubert's brilliance, the comic wasn't received well in Tarzan's lucrative foreign market, where Russ Manning's version of Tarzan was consider sacrosanct. This led to the licence transferring to Marvel in 1977, who would publish 29 issues and three Annuals from '77-'79. The series was written by Roy Thomas with artwork from John Buscema. Trouble was, Buscema wanted his Tarzan to look like the brilliant Kubert version. So the same problems that beset the DC version also came to haunt this version. What we get, as comic fans, is two classic versions of Tarzan, drawn by two masters at the height of their powers.

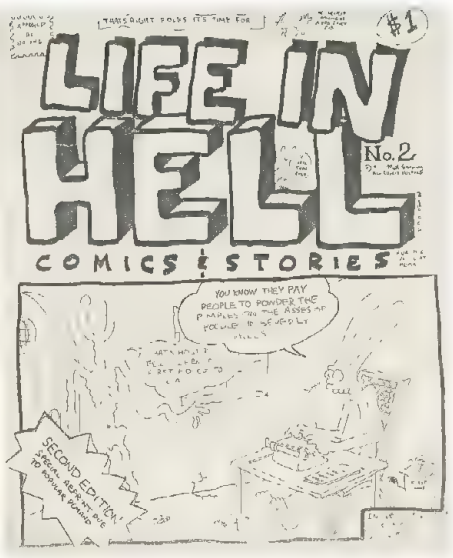



## Star Wars #1

Written by Roy Thomas,
art by Howard Chaykin.
Publisher - Marvel Comics

1977 was the year of Star Wars and Marvel Comics were very quick off the mark with their adaptation of the first movie. So fast in fact that they published the first issue on April 12, 1977, more than a month ahead of the US movie release on May 25, 1977. The first six issues adapted the film and the long lead-in may account for those minor inconsistencies you can see in the comic - Luke & Obi-Wan's red lightsabers? Han's yellow jacket? A green helmeted Darth Vader? And that's just on first issue's cover!

But those inconsistencies aside, the Marvel Star Wars comic was a huge success, critically and commercially. So much so that the series went on to give Star Wars fans a monthly fix of the extended SW universe until 1986. It also provided Marvel Comics with much needed cash in a dire time for the company, to the extent that former Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter has said in the past that Star Wars saved Marvel at the time.

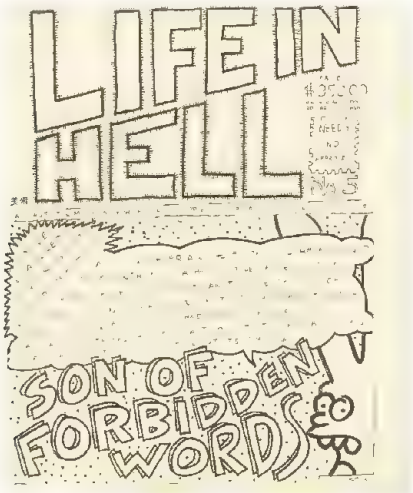


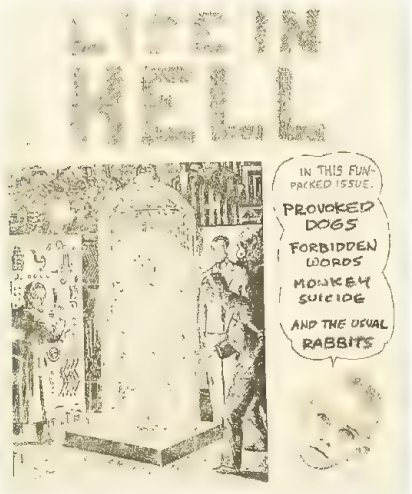

## Life in Hell

By Matt Groening
Self-published

When Matt Groening made his first photocopied little comic, Life is Hell, he had no idea where his life would take him. In the future, Life is Hell would become a hit and Groening, of course, would go on to become the creator of the Simpsons. But that was way off for the 23-year-old Groening, freshly relocated to LA and working crappy jobs to live his dream of being a writer. He took out his frustrations with his life in comic form, with a comic covering everything and everything Groening felt like ranting about at the time, with a cast of ridiculous characters including Binky the rabbit with just one ear, and Akbar & Jeff, the fez and Charlie Brown striped shirt wearing couple/brothers/whatever.

Initially, Groening sold copies to his friends and from the book section of the record store he worked at. But things moved pretty quickly from then, with first the avant-garde Wet magazine picking it up and then the Los Angeles Reader. Within a few years, the first Life is Hell book collections came out, and there was a little animated project on the horizon - initially it was meant to feature the Life is Hell characters, but Groening figured that he'd have to give up ownership rights and lose the strip when the animated segment, for The Tracey Ullman Show, failed to take off. Oh Matt, how wrong you were.



## The Return of the New Gods & Mister Miracle

New Gods - Written by Gerry Conway. Art by Don Newton, Rich Buckler, Dan Adkins. Mister Miracle - By Steve Englehart & Marshall Rogers, Steve Gerber & Michael Golden.
Publisher - DC Comics (USA)

1977 was a year of returns for many characters over in the USA, with DC Comics attempting, after more than five years away to bring back a couple of titles from Jack Kirby's Fourth World - minus Jack Kirby.

Firstly, there was The New Gods, Jack Kirby's magnum opus, sadly unfinished, cancelled out from under him in the early '70s. DC brought it back in '77 with Gerry Conway writing a continuation of Kirby's saga with Darkseid searching for that anti-life equation (again). For whatever reason, the equation is held in the minds of six humans, meaning it's a perfect opportunity for the New Gods to split up, get to Earth, and start beating

> Firstly, there was The New Gods, Jack Kirby's magnum opus, sadly unfinished, cancelled out from under him in the early '70s.

things up with little worry about establishing much drama beforehand. Much like Kirby's original, the premise and the promise of New Gods was a lot better than what we eventually read. And just like Kirby's original, the plug was pulled before the conclusion - although at least here, DC had the decency to let the series actually finish in the pages of Adventure Comics.

And then there was the missed opportunity of Mister Miracle. It was the longest running of Kirby's original Fourth World, getting to 18 issues. And again, DC brought it back, this time continuing the numbering. Issues 19-22 were by Steve Englehart and Marshal Rogers (who were about to revitalise the world of Batman in Dark Detective) and issues 23-25 by Steve Gerber and Michael Golden. Unlike the New Gods, this was a much better little run with, as you'd expect, some stunning artwork from Rogers and Golden. Sadly, DC pulled the plug again with issue 25, leaving the storylines hanging. Poor old Scott Free, never seems to manage to escape cancellation, does he?

PURSUING THE ASSASSIN CALLED SLAYMASTER, CAPTAIN BRITAIN FALLS INTO A TRAP!
MY TELE-SCANNER REVEALS THE INTRUDER!
WRITTEN BY JIM LAWRENCE, DRAWN BY RON WILSON, INKED BY PABLO MARCOS' STUDIO, EDITED BY LARRY LIEBER.

## Super Spider-Man & Captain Britain #231-253

Written by Bob Budiansky, Jim Lawrence, Larry Lieber, Chris Claremont, art by Ron Wilson, Pablo Martin, John Byrne.
Marvel Comics (UK)

Captain Britain's 1976 Marvel UK comic hit the sales skids in 1977 and that all too familiar sales dip meant that issue 39 was his last before merging into Spider-Man with issue 231 of that series becoming Super Spider-Man & Captain Britain.

Inside, the adventures of Captain Britain continued very much in the style of his own comic, with a uniquely American Marvel idea of what Britain was like and a character that was just a generic Marvel superhero that just happened to have a few trappings of Britishness. Things picked up with issues 248-253 reprinting Marvel Team-Up 65 and 66 and a Spidey/Cap adventure in Arcade's Murderworld.

But that was it, Captain Britain was dropped from the comic and the title, not to return until 1979 where he was a mere guest-star in the Black Knight strip in Hulk Comic, the 'Otherworld Saga', written by Steve Parkhouse with art by John Stokes –

finally a better story and, incredibly, the very first time Captain Britain was written and drawn by British creators. After that, things began to look up for the Captain, with his 1981 return bringing a new costume and new creative team – Dave Thorpe and Alan Davis. And not long after that, a certain Alan Moore hopped on board to really take things up a notch.

# COMIC FACTS

**Eagle Awards** begin and presented at Comicon 77

National Periodical Publications changes its name to **DC Comics**, Inc

The **final Al Capp's Li'l Abner is published**, having been in newspaper syndication since 1934

**Eclipse Comics** begin publishing

**Planet of the Apes** Issue 29 cancelled by Marvel

Judge Dredd begins in **2000AD Issue 2** and this year introduces Rico Dredd and Judge Giant

Sparky ends and merges with Topper

# 1977

**interesting facts about the comics and characters of 1977**

Stan Lee and John Romita Sr The **Amazing Spider-Man** newspaper strip begins

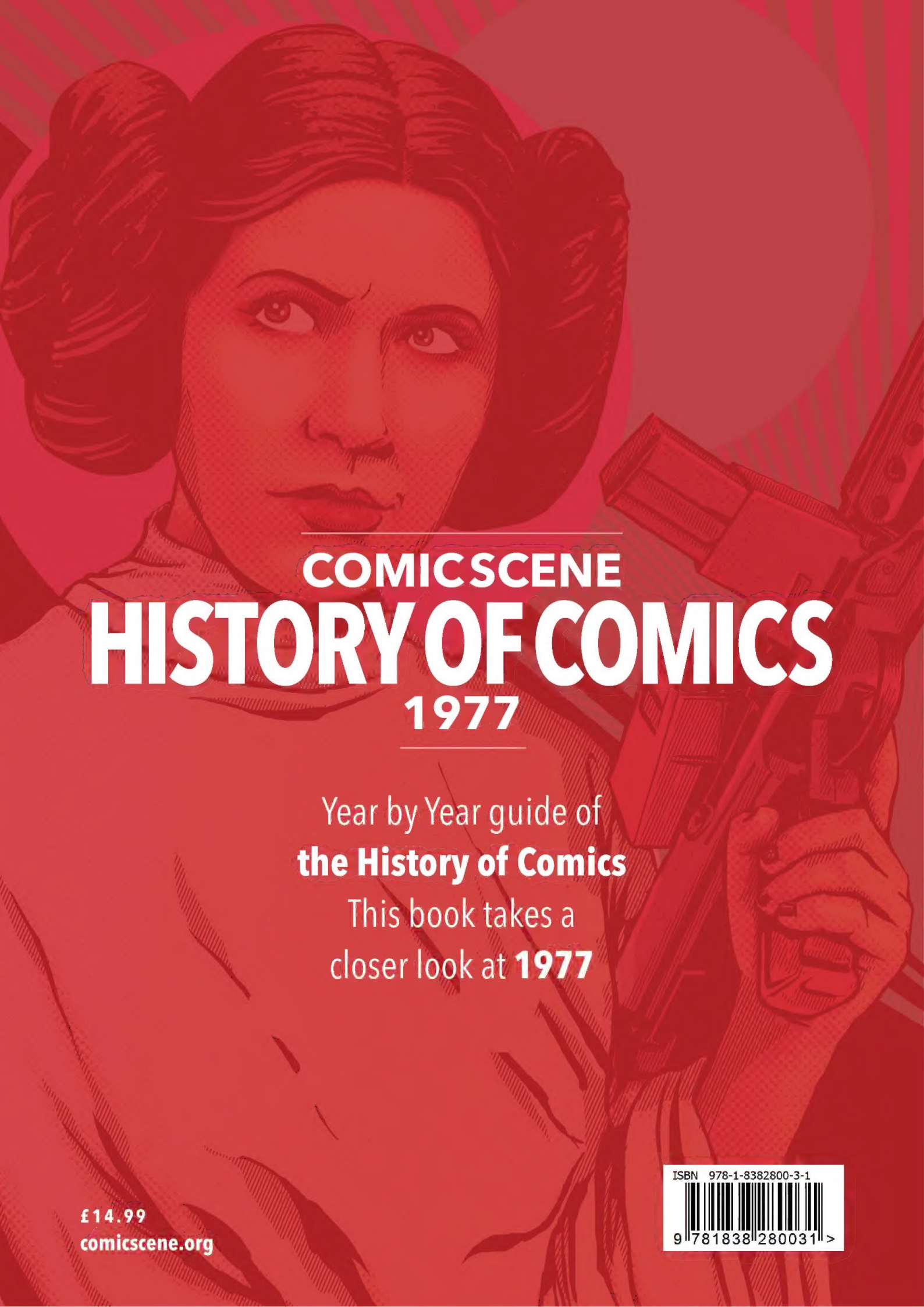
Rene Goscinny, French comic writer of **Asterix, Lucky Luke and Iznagoud**, dies age 51

Our Army At War changes title to **Sgt.Rock** and Star Spangled War Stories to the Unknown Soldier

**First issue of Rip Off Comix is published**

Ciao for **Girls Magazine** is launched in Japan

New Captain Britain stories appear in the retitled **Super Spider-Man and Captain Britain**



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